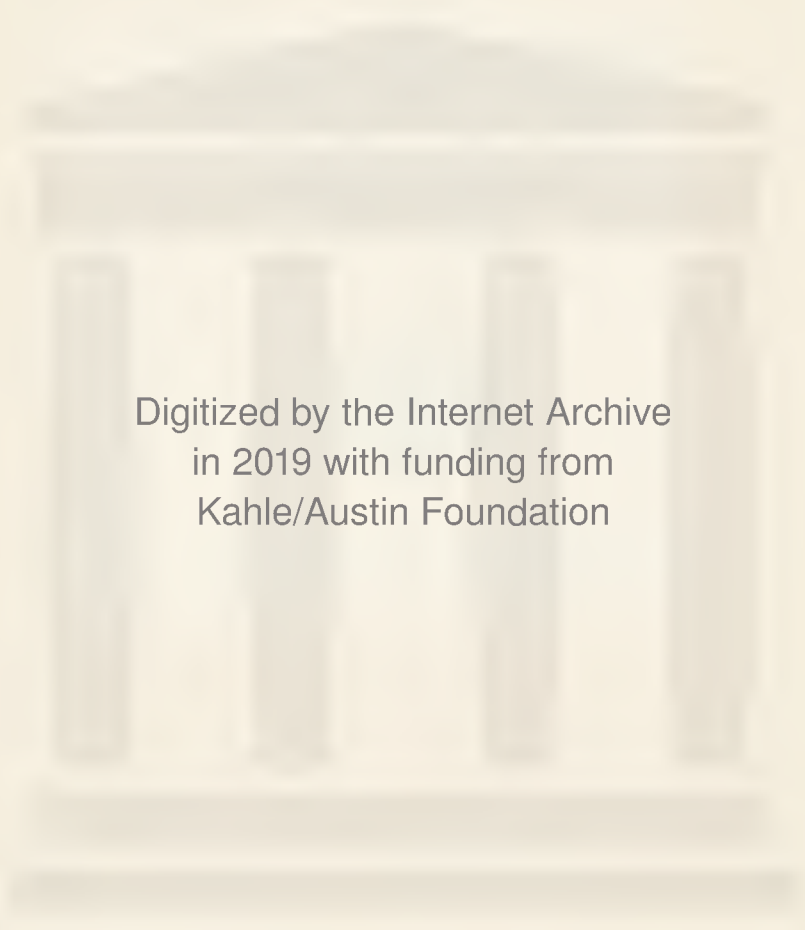


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JOSEPH CONRAD

*A short study of his intellectual and
emotional attitude toward his
work and of the chief
characteristics of
his novels*



BY WILSON FOLLETT

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NOTE

THIS little book has been specially prepared in response to a demand from a growing number of readers, students of literature, and teachers who desire a concise appreciation of Joseph Conrad and his work. Mr. Follett was left entirely free in the development of his study, and the conclusions formulated here are those of an independent critic who, the publishers think, has directed attention to certain rare values in Mr. Conrad's work that have a special worth for this country and this time.

The Study is not for sale. As long as the printing lasts copies will be supplied gratis to all who request them. Address the publishers:

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FOREWORD

WHAT I have recklessly undertaken to supply, in the narrow space of the essay which follows, is an account in general terms of Mr. Conrad's intellectual and emotional attitude toward his work and of the most striking characteristics of that work. Other matters of importance—his life and its relation to his work, his growth in proficiency, stage by stage, his special contribution to the body and permanency of the short story as a form, his style in the more limited sense of verbal fitness and phrasal beauty, his humor (most often grim, ironical, or sardonic, but once at least, in "The Duel," airily frivolous), his treatment of character and of places and things, his assimilation of French and Russian influences, and his probable importance to modern realism—I have had to relinquish to a still more reckless occasion, and probably to a much braver pen. Any one of these matters is enough for a larger essay than the present.

I have referred in every case to the American editions of Mr. Conrad's books. *The Nigger of*

the "*Narcissus*" was first published in this country as *The Children of the Sea*, but its original title is restored (at least, officially, on the cover) in a second edition. *Typhoon*, published separately in America, appears with "Falk," etc., in England. I take no account of stories printed in periodicals and still uncollected in America, since such stories are often mangled by excision at their first appearance or substantially revised before their second. Of *The Inheritors* (recently reprinted in this country) and *Romance*, the two novels written in collaboration with Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer, I have also said nothing, because, with whatever assurance I might select specific passages as the work of one collaborator, I could speak with no authority about the design of either work as a whole. Of the two novels about revolutionists, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*, I have chosen for brevity's sake to discuss only the latter, as being incomparably the greater. *The Secret Agent* is an intellectual extravaganza, and as such a delight; but its irony is of treatment alone—a flimsy pretence by contrast with *Under Western Eyes*, where the irony is of fate itself working through the soul of a people. I have italicized the titles of whole volumes and quoted the

titles of stories which do not constitute whole volumes.

It was my ambition and my dream to say here, as the most deserved and the most quietly sincere tribute to Mr. Conrad, something about criticism, its missed privileges and its shirked responsibilities; something that should amount to a declaration of faith in its golden opportunities, an expressed aspiration toward some recognizable ideal for the critical spirit—or perhaps only a groping among dissatisfactions for that which I do not know where or how to discover. In no way could I speak more acceptably to the large number who read and welcome Mr. Conrad as just what he is trying to be, not as what he may seem incidentally, secondarily, and as it were by accident—or to the still larger number who are so to read and welcome him. But I found myself lacking the strength, the wit, the fine constructive ingenuity, not to speak of the time and the space. I do not know that I have even remotely implied, in the few pages that follow, the substance or the definition of my desire. I can say no more, and certainly no less, than that the critical spirit can mean, ought to mean, in some indefinable sense does mean, as high an inspiration as Mr. Kipling preaches in his poem

“To the True Romance.” Nor do I know what among present intellectual realities could with more fitness stir into activity the will to such inspiration than the series of books inaugurated with *Almayer's Folly* twenty years ago. Only—

*“Enough for me in dreams to see
And touch Thy garments' hem:
Thy feet have trod so near to God
I may not follow them!”*

At that altitude, where criticism becomes the True Romance of the intellect, the merely human lungs may perhaps pardonably fail, the merely human head swim.

At all events I have tried to deal, if at the lower levels, with something more than a negligible part of the whole truth.

W. F.

JOSEPH CONRAD

"The artist . . . speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn."

—Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."*

IN A brief account of Mr. Joseph Conrad—allowing for the one insistent purpose of a just comprehension, that increasingly honoured name to stand simply for a given tangible achievement, a sum of volumes mounting all but to the full score, from *Almayer's Folly* of twenty years ago to *Victory* of, it seems, the day before yesterday—the simplest curt rectitude is an affair of some difficulty. Whatever enchanted brand of pen Mr. Conrad takes in his hand—that it should so yieldingly discourse for him light and life—whatever charmed name of maker stamps that "sacrosanct pen of authorship," clearly the pursuing secondary pen of criticism, if it is

to make an exhibition the least honourable, must be of the finest point and temper. Partly, so much is to affirm our author's own high regard for criticism, "that fine flower of personal expression in the garden of letters," and his firm insistence that criticism must be, if not an adventurous exploit, at least more than "a mere feat of agility on the part of a trained pen running in a desert." Partly, again, the case has been beset and embarrassed by criticism so remote from the spirit of adventure or, failing that, so wantonly and wildly adventurous, that not to stress everywhere the ungracious note of protest becomes a forbearance of some virtue, attainable in the end only on some such ground as that to deny the affirmations of others is not usually to affirm anything new. Even so, the note of protest will not consent to be muffled short of the suggestion that there has grown a gap between what Mr. Conrad offers himself as being and what he is commonly received for, so that the incurred quarrel of the critic is more with the terms of his acceptance than with any proposed rejection. The mildness of which quarrel is ascribable, of course, to the singular fortune of an author about whom the whole struggle reduces itself to friendly

contentions among his friends; there being, against this elemental fact of friendships established, a place found, acceptance won on *any* terms, no other fact whatsoever that can remain in countenance. So much by way of glad concession serves but to bring one straight back to the grand engulfing central difficulty of all, the inordinate complexity of the author himself—a complexity among the various involved terms of which the pen of criticism must risk its adventure.

In the number and richness of the incidental suggestions raised by this figure of an adventure embarked upon—farewells to the familiar, new paths blazed, perils by the way, inescapable risk that the undertaking may in the upshot prove no better then misadventure, possible thrill of arrival at a destination—there is more than can here be named or utilized. To unite, so far as may be, all such suggestions under one head is to say that what our audacity aspires to is precisely Mr. Conrad's *story*—the story, that is, of his own intellectual and æsthetic adventure, with its excitement, its constant climactic procession, its surprise treading on the heels of surprise toward some end still undescribed; to the

dynamic force of which process no other designation can begin to do justice. And even at this earliest point it can hardly fail to occur that the way to make the most of such a story, in which internal or profoundly spiritual events take the place of external or purely physical, is to tell it as Mr. Conrad tells some of his characteristic stories, backward from the end. Or, there being, while still the unexhausted reservoir promises to flow without stint or stoppage, happily no question of an end, let us more fitly say from the middle. From which approach we have but to turn aside an instant to dispose of this or that lurking suggestion of formulated periods, Early, Middle, or Late, the traps all too cunningly set for criticism to spring under unwary authorship, and often, it must be granted, all too tamely fallen into by authorship itself. With Mr. Conrad, who holds out so valorously against classification in terms of all other tendencies and personalities whatsoever, who is, to the very latest moment that can be reported on, so inexorably and serenely himself, it is perhaps the most satisfying of all possible symptoms that he holds < out equally against classification in terms even of his own past. For both to describe an author

in æsthetic or historical terms other than those of his own proposing and, hardly less, to describe him in terms of his former self, are fashions of measuring or mastering or finally "placing" him, of dismissing him, that is, on the terms easiest and least expensive for the critic. In such cases the dismissal is no less definite for happening to involve a kind of acceptance—acceptance, or even welcome, into the comfortable region of the known, the takable for granted, the summed-up past, and the anticipated future. Such acceptance, leaving as it does for the critic neither risk nor reward, is perhaps the most dismal fortune, short of absolute rejection, that can befall a writer still living and producing. Whereas it is Mr. Conrad's superior fortune that he refuses to be taken, in the full sense, on any terms short of the costliest; his entire evolution thus far having been a history of shifting attitudes, revised methods, amplitudes won but to be impatiently discarded—a spectacle, in short, of the liveliest originality at play over the whole rich interpenetration of outward act and inward thought, of the will run over into the deed, which makes up the one possible subject—infinite life itself. To assert this originality, implying as it does the

high competence of the expert in collaboration with the unjaded exuberance of the amateur, is to reaffirm the peculiar interest and thrill of Mr. Conrad's case or, as we have abruptly named it, his story. No other process than the inverted, we have said, can cope with the complications of a story whose whole objective is, after all, the achieved fusion of elements so many and so diverse.

For this is at once the glamour and the solid worth of Mr. Conrad's achievement: that what it affords, under and through all the diversities, the seeming contradictions, or flat renunciations, is an instance of consistency at its bravest and brightest. And if consistency seem in general rather a timid virtue (not to raise the question of its seeming a virtue at all), it can be answered that Mr. Conrad's distinction is to have turned it from a submission into a triumph. Not in our time surely has there been an example of coherence so triumphing over all the forces leagued against it—forces recruited, not alone from the inherent rigours of the challenge accepted, the celebrated task of self-expression undertaken, but still more from among the various phases of the author's own genius, his different kinds of attitude and attention. When, if ever, the record

of fiction has shown in a single mind so many discordant appearances harmonized or even (still hardly to exceed the fact) so many impossibilities made actual, we cannot venture to speculate. Let it at any rate serve for text, even if not conceded for axiom, that the true exploit of criticism with Mr. Conrad is to uncover what is most central in him, and to read the rest of him in the light of that; to define, as nearly as can be managed, the nucleus of unifying principle that makes him so complexly single, so variously one.

To that end, so far as analogy serves, we may liken the whole man—his heritage, his successive experiences of life, his variegated display of creative gifts—to some bright liquid stream forced through a larger funnel into a smaller, and then into a smaller still, and so on indefinitely, with constant acceleration and increase of pressure, the gain in concentration everywhere offsetting the loss in volume, so that there is in effect no loss. Less fancifully, this is to say that our author has made his way through the strait places of life without suffering any loss except such as could reappear elsewhere for more than its worth of enrichment (the loss, for example, as he remarks, of some few frail illusions); and

that he has explored the no less difficult ways of imaginative fiction equally without having to leave anything behind. Whatever he has ceased to use or need he has forthwith turned into something else and clung to, the more tenaciously perhaps because there is no item of his equipment that he has acquired without difficulty. One result is that there can hardly be traced in the whole cluttered field of letters a line of march so little bestrewn with discarded baggage of methods, principles, ideals, loyalties. A further result and, for this purpose a more important, is the endless compression or withdrawal of his whole personality upon itself, into a veritable triumph of self-sufficiency, until it presents the hardest and smoothest thinkable surface against all incursion of doubts, delusions, and regrets. If self-sufficiency in the present meaning were to seem an outcome for dismay, on the score of realities abandoned or life broken company with, one would have only to reflect how much of life that sufficient "self" consists of, and how exclusively the very fact of such compression *means* life gathered in, drunken deeply of, assimilated. There is and can be, for such takings-in, no applicable measure but the repeated givings-out,

the involved consistency of which, as expressed in the large handful of stories, is our prime concern.

To state Mr. Conrad's enrichment as that mainly of compression is the more directly to approach the unifying principle which we have dared to allege as lying at the core of his achievement, and as drawing the otherwise scattered parts of his ingenuity into a single concrete mass, with a force akin to that of gravity at work upon some nebulous chaos to make, all compact and rounded, a globe. That principle consists of his particular view of the world and, standing in a somewhat paradoxical relation to that, his other view of what the world can be made to mean to the individual—tritely and formidably, in two words, his philosophy of the cosmos and, sharpest of contradictions, his philosophy of life. Not wantonly to evoke the consternation of the reader, let it in all haste be added that we are not to dream of proposing a cosmic philosophy as the end, or even in any large sense as the means, of imaginative fiction. But it is important to know through what clear or clouded window the soul takes its outward look upon life, what the direction that window faces, and with what degree of refraction the thousand familiar aspects of the known world strike the

retina that is to be trusted for restoring them in a shape which we can but accept as a form of truth. Wisely we say, let not a writer's philosophy call attention to itself. But, remembering that not to have thought about everything is substantially to have thought about nothing, we as wisely say, let his philosophy be immovably, invisibly *there*, an anchor let go to windward, secure in the unfathomed. To reflect that a man's philosophy, as truly as his waistcoat or his cigars, is the choice of his individual taste and temperament is perhaps to cheat the word of half its terror—certainly of all its affront. As Mr. Conrad likes to remember, "Failing the resolution to hold our peace, we can only talk about ourselves"—even or especially when we talk about our philosophy. Least of all, then, need we urge in this bearing that, by way of self-criticism, Mr. Conrad finds himself constrained to say so much of ultimate things. The necessity is solely of our looking inward upon him through the very aperture by which he looks outward—the one through which we could least afford a glance if the question were of estimating his philosophy, of proving him right or wrong. The question is rather of finding out what his ultimate view is, and by what oddest twist of

temperament he holds such a view of the ultimate only to deny it everywhere in terms of the immediate, in which solely fiction owns its direct concern. Once more to let criticism snatch its hint from Mr. Conrad's narrative procedure, we replace discarded chronology (a security of dullards) with this motif, the constant impingement upon each other of his two strangely opposed visions of nature and of man; which contrast we undertake to remember throughout as the determining essence of our subject. The reader will be at no loss to remember how, in the sketch of Mr. Conrad's life called *A Personal Record* (in the English edition, *Some Reminiscences*), the major transition of his career, represented by his first book, *Almayer's Folly*, swings on one pivot the whole series of events and stretch of time; or how, in that first book itself, the house named in derision "Almayer's Folly" unites at last under one roof the tragic mischances of Almayer's life; or how, in the stupendous pageant of material interests called *Nostromo*, the San Tomé mine delimits the centre of gravity of the entire sprawling, shifting spectacle. For some such part playable in this our reduced scale, we may look to Mr. Conrad's mutually hostile conceptions of man and man's world.

I

TO BEGIN, then, with the present and what is central in it, we are in the very moment of finding the clash or conflict, and the compression upon each other of the two conflicting forces, crucially instanced in the novel *Victory*. Axel Heyst, a homeless Swedish baron whose orbit centres in the Malay Archipelago, withdraws to Samburan, a remote island deserted by a dead commercial enterprise, taking with him a young English girl whom he has met in Sourabaya and rescued from an unprotected position in a travelling orchestra. Schomberg, the detestable and fleshy proprietor of the inn from which Heyst and "Lena" have fled, who had also become infatuated with the girl, engineers a plan for revenge, and at the same time rids himself of a nuisance, tolerated overlong, by setting on the track of the fugitive pair two gentlemen adventurers who have been haunting his hotel and turning it into a gambling resort. These two, "plain Mr. Jones" the misogynist and his satellite Ricardo, together

with their half-savage slave Pedro, descend on Samburan in an open boat, covetous of a secret treasure which exists only in their fancy and in the hints calculatingly let fall by Schomberg. Ricardo discovers the presence of Lena, and in stolen interviews urges her to reveal the hidden treasure and abscond with him. His principal, Jones, aware at last of the presence of a woman to whom Ricardo has transferred his fawning allegiance, shoots Ricardo; but the first bullet, missing its billet, enters the breast of Lena, who dies in Heyst's arms. Meanwhile Wang, the Chinese servant of Heyst, has shot Pedro; and Jones, who sees that the game is up, either leaps or falls into Black Diamond Bay at the end of the crumbling jetty. Heyst, in his despair, sets fire to the bungalow, immolating himself and the body of Lena. . . . Such, in crude outline, is the highly specialized story told.

Not in this context to linger over the method of the telling, the significance of the story is all wrapped in the title—which, as a label merely for the plot of sanguinary disasters, might better have been *Failure*. The victory is Lena's. It is embodied, first, in that ghastly scene where, submitting herself momentarily to the nauseous en-

dearments of Ricardo, she tricks him into giving up the knife which may prove Heyst's salvation, capturing so "the very sting of death in the service of love." On a higher plane, her victory is over herself: over some half-unacknowledged thing in herself that has been oppressed by the sense of living in an unholy love, and that has cried out silently for expiation. On the highest personal plane of all, the victory is that of her woman's simplicity over Heyst's sophistication. In the first instance his love had been compounded of curiosity and compassion: she had never won him really and, living, never could win him. But when at the last he understood how she had died for him, she was "content to surrender to him the infinite weariness of her tremendous achievement," for she saw him "ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart—forever." There is, however, another aspect above the personal. Lena's conquest is not alone over her own soul and her lover's: it is over a destructive and paralyzing philosophy of life, the pessimism of inaction and deliberately chosen solitude. Axel Heyst is the son of an iconoclastic writer and thinker, of a man who had believed in nothing, not even in flesh and blood.

"A full and equable contempt" had been the father's solution of everything, his ultimate wisdom. "But since you have not attained to it," he told the son, "I advise you to cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity . . . Look on—make no sound." In pursuance of which formula, Axel Heyst lives most of his days seeing men and women "go by thick as dust, revolving and jostling one another like figures cut out of cork, and weighted with lead just sufficiently to keep them in their proudly upright posture." Action good or evil, action from indifference or from solicitude, he regards as "the barbed hook, baited with the illusion of progress, to bring out of the lightless void the shoals of unnumbered generations." None the less, being a figure of instinctive gentility, groping in spite of his own will through the night of his philosophy with all his social antennæ sensitively outstretched, he seizes the barbed hook in the form of a service lightly rendered to the bankrupt ship captain, Morrison. Later, when he finds that men had supposed Morrison to have become his helpless prey instead of his beneficiary, he renews his old resentment against life, "that commonest of snares, in which he felt himself caught, seeing

clearly the plot of plots and unconsolated by the lucidity of his mind." Apprehending not until long afterward this old calumny against himself, he feels again the defilement of action, the charitable action which had given rise to the calumny. "I feel," he says, "a disgust at my own person, as if I had tumbled into some filthy hole." But it is the saving irony of his fate that, before this experience, he has felt and yielded to the drawing of love—of love which his father had reckoned the most cruel of the stratagems of life, and the most subtle. The crowning reward of Lena's service of love, the apex of her triumph, is all in the instant when Heyst, face to face with the dismal failure of his philosophy, turns at last with a cry to the immemorial refuge of disillusioned men—the goodness of life, the goodness of even its honest failures. "'Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love—and to put its trust in life.'" Such is the splendid, the finally dominant sanity of the book. Like *Youth*, like *Lord Jim*, it is a re-reading of Conrad's favourite lesson: the lesson of physical failure turned, by the terms on which it is accepted, into spiritual triumph.

The special aptness of Heyst's pessimism about

the human affair lies in its being a logical extension of Mr. Conrad's pessimism about the universal affair. What Heyst, in his fondly nurtured aloofness, believes about man, the creator of Heyst believes about the whole of nature including man. To the riddle of the universe, the "To what end?" or "To what good?" asked of the soul by the incomprehensible whole of things, Mr. Conrad's answer is a refusal of the whole question. The universe is, for him, not kind or cruel, not law-abiding or law-breaking: it is simply "not ethical at all," but "purely spectacular." The only purpose of things is the purpose they serve by bare brute existence, to which the only tenable relation of the human consciousness is the played-upon relation of audience. The act of contemplation alone and the emotions thereby evoked are "a moral end in themselves." "And the unwearied self-forgetful attention to every phase of the universe reflected in our consciousness may be our appointed task on this earth: a task in which fate has perhaps engaged nothing of us except our conscience, gifted with a voice in order to bear true testimony to the visible wonder . . . of the sublime spectacle." A cosmos there neither for good nor for evil, but indifferently or stolidly

there for just what the refined consciousness can make of it, is the utmost exaction of such a view. If the body of fiction with which we have now to do were for illustration merely of a world so conceived, the story which criticism has to tell would be of the shortest. It could consist of tragic ironies alone, and its last summarizing word would report what here serves for no more than prologue: the impenetrable system of facts which our author confronts in one succinct phrase (uttered in connection with the death of Don Martin Decoud, that fated child of disenchantment and, next to Heyst, the most fascinating of Conrad's intellectuals), "the immense indifference of things." At no such point, however, could our account thinkably end so long as our author holds with us, for a truth the most unpretendingly serviceable, that the prime concern of fiction is not with ultimate things but with immediate. Ultimately, Conrad's indifferent universe is that of Mr. Thomas Hardy, with only the distinction, more of temperament than of logic, that Hardy paints the universe *so* indifferent as to make it out malevolent. Both views, remote from each other as they are in æsthetic effect, lead with equal readiness to Heyst's vision of puny men-and-women figures of

cork or cardboard, absurdly weighted with the illusion of their own importance. The one altogether probable outcome of a universe beheld as indifferent is indifference in the beholder.

But it is exactly at this point of transition from the whole to the parts, from man's world to man, that Mr. Conrad achieves the first and finest of his paradoxes. Where the historian of Wessex builds up an infinite number of human disasters into a world framed to illustrate the incarnate principle of disaster, Conrad uses "the immense indifference of things"—all things—to heighten the sense of a quite different irony, inherent in the very blankness of the wall man has to front, and the dignity of man himself, his undismayed strivings, his indomitable hopes, the lustre of his tragic triumphs. In Wessex with Mr. Hardy, nature as a comprehensive whole is brought oppressively near and made to impend darkly over man, to the immediate purpose of belittling him and his works the more sardonically at last to crush and engulf them. On the Seven Seas with Mr. Conrad the trick of focus is so differently contrived that, even were the lens similarly darkened, the total vision evoked could share none of the same implications. Conrad's nature, by no means less stupendous, is

incalculably more remote—spiritually, that is, more detached from man (for as a physical force merely it often enough overshadows man); instead of a mask for the malevolent will to destroy, it is actually and literally the inscrutable face of nothingness, of moral negation. And the paradox wrested from it by the peculiar logic of temperament is, in a word, that the whole is *not* greater than the sum of its parts; that man is in himself greater than the whole of nature including man. For, granted only the right creative temper, what is a blank universe if not a blank signed cheque, for the faculties of courage and imagination to fill in with whatever handsome figure their audacity can rise to?—there being to that figure, while audacity holds out, indeed positively no limit. And what is Mr. Conrad's perpetual state if not that of audacity at its most exorbitant? He is probably the first novelist to use entire skepticism about the whole of things as the principal reason for illimitable faith in the separate parts that lie nearest his interest. In his pagan pragmatism despair about man (in whom, we can but repeat, fiction finds its centre of gravity) is the final upshot, not of despair about the universe, but of hope. To see nature as a mirror of the kindly face of God

is to turn shuddering from man, who alone devastates the handiwork of God. To see nature as the inscrutable and chilling countenance of some frightful enigma—the enigma perhaps of nothingness—is to turn back, as Heyst did in the end, to man and the warmth of his hearth-fires. When Conrad shows a case of despair, such as Heyst's, he means, not that life in a purely spectacular world is of necessity a desperate transaction, but that despair itself is the one completely desperate thing. It is on the futility of despair, not on its logical justification, that he has everywhere insisted. In his tales, lurking invisibly to exert on the mind of man a silent pressure toward the skeptical view of conduct and its worth, and to numb every faculty into such passive drifting as Heyst surrendered himself to, there exists this sense of the meaninglessness of the universe. But the mind and will of man, even where they are defeated, remain the hero—the mind more vast and intricate than all the rest of the spectacle because it can comprehend the vast intricacy of the whole and invent its own values in addition; the will more powerful than all the impersonal forces banded to defeat it because its faith can tread even into defeat all the spiritual meaning of victory.

Such duality is the distilled essence of Mr. Conrad's thought in the cluster of novels and tales. In *some* kind of duality must lie the nucleus of any fiction, since the whole basis of fiction is conflict or struggle; and, granted equal powers of observation and craftsmanship (with which powers we are not at this moment occupied), the worth of the fiction mounts according to the plane on which the struggle takes place. On a plane so low as hardly to exist independently in literature, it may take place between forces merely physical; on a higher, between mental or moral forces of different protagonists; on a somewhat higher still, perhaps, between such forces at clash in a single personality. At each of these altitudes our author breathes freely, as becomes a sufficient self hardened in every active or reflective shift of the human struggle for self-defence; and the listless reader who has no thrill to spare for the summit of the whole adventurous series may stop and take his contentment where he will. That summit, marking as it does the character of all the great memorable episodes in Conrad from the tragic failure of Almayer to the tragic success of Lena, is the region from which we view each lesser and lower battle as only an insignificant part of the one supreme

contest, that of man's infinite mind against man's infinite world. The magnitude of that duel, the most illustrious and the bravest in which the human spirit can bear its honourable part, invests much of Mr. Conrad's work with the excitement and glamour of romance—extinguishing at the same time, effectually and for all, the tinsel trumpery of suspense, surprise, coincidence, deliberately contrived mystery, and the other candles with which we sometimes try to light the sun.

Mr. Conrad's process of depicting the greater struggle in terms of the lesser amounts, in some cases quite frankly, to a species of restrained symbolism. In *Victory* Jones and Ricardo (in some estimates ruled out of court as no better than preposterous villains of melodrama) stand partly as symbols. "Here they are, the envoys of the outer world," says Heyst of these two and their enchained and primitive servitor Pedro. "Here they are before you—evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back. A trio of fitting envoys, perhaps, but what about the welcome? Suppose I were armed, could I shoot down those two where they stand?" Later Jones is moved to explain: ". . . in one way I am . . . the world

itself, come to pay you a visit . . . I am a sort of fate—the retribution that waits its time.” And to Lena Ricardo seemed “the embodied evil of the world.” Not evil utterly, though, these powers of the outer world—the mind, the flesh, the muscling brutish force; not evil utterly, since their will to destroy ends only in a new and spiritualized creation. They are unmitigated destructive energy only to a philosophy of life such as Heyst’s, a philosophy of negation. His tragedy lay in his belief that “truth, work, ambition, love itself” were “only counters in the lamentable or despicable game of life.” In the final impact with the mingled forces he had shunned instead of opposing he discovered those counters to be the stake itself, the eminent values of the game.

It is part of Mr. Conrad’s consistency to portray skepticism, a kind of humility that demands little of the world, as essentially more hopeful than the ethical universalism which he discards, a kind of arrogance that demands too much. The contrast becomes salient if one places over against the suicide of Heyst, who had nothing left to live for, the youthful and more tragic suicide of Martin Decoud who had everything left. Decoud is a sample of the man who tries to exact a coherence not in the

nature of things, and who cries out in dread when he is brought to confront the nature of things without veil or illusion. Decoud, finding in the "quadrille of the universe" no such intelligible rhythm as he had sought, postponed or ignored his problem, and tried to forget it in a fevered activity in which he could but half believe. Then, torn from that fictitious dependence, dropped into an island solitude to guard a hoard of silver, he came too suddenly upon the naked reality of the universe he had misconceived. A child of sophistication, "he was not fit to grapple with himself single-handed." He caught himself "entertaining a doubt of his own individuality," losing "all belief in the reality of his action past and to come." The palpable world became a mockery: his mind filled it with "jibbering and obscene spectres." And in ten days of inaction and solitude his own instability killed him, "a victim of the disillusioned weariness which is the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity." His audacity had taken the form of requiring an ordered universe. When he found it only "a succession of incomprehensible images," his mind swayed and toppled. For Mr. Conrad the heroic soul is the soul to which nothing unearned is necessary, to which not even everything is neces-

sary—to which, therefore, all that is, is gain. Decoud and, before his one flash of insight, Heyst, are the conspicuously reflective protagonists of Mr. Conrad's books. But, says their creator, "nothing humanely great has come from reflection." Decoud's disaster in *Nostromo* interlocks, too, with the author's final word about his purely spectacular cosmos: ". . . a spectacle for awe, love, adoration, or hate, if you like, but in this view—and in this view alone—never for despair! . . . In this view there is room for every religion except for the inverted creed of impiety, the mask and cloak of arid despair . . ."

In the life lived under the curiously protecting shadow of such a philosophy—a philosophy that magnifies "every fair dream, every charitable hope" into heroic dimensions, as so much positive gain wrested from the blank negation of the universe—the crucial points are the transitions; and the characteristic worth of the transitions is, as we have prefigured, their compression toward one centre of so many kinds of values so variously derived. Mr. Conrad alludes, with a singularly even apportionment of affection, to his "two lives," his twenty years on the decks of ships, his

later twenty at "the more circumscribed space" of his desk. These are in reality his second and third lives, the first lying in the seventeen years behind them—a twilit zone of preparation and self-discovery in which the consciousness of the child and youth began to shake off the wrappings of an immemorial past. Born of an inland people, in a country without a shore, with military and political traditions behind him, heir to the griefs of unhappy Poland and her hatred of the cynical autocracy which had hunted so many parents besides his into exile, he nevertheless mysteriously responded to "the murmur of the great sea, which," he says, "must have somehow reached my inland cradle and entered my unconscious ear, like that formula of Mohammedan faith the Mussulman father whispers into the ear of his new-born infant, making him one of the faithful almost with his first breath." Many years later the grown man, after a round score of years in the discipline of the sea, years filled with "the voices of rough men now no more, the strong voice of the everlasting winds, and the whisper of a mysterious spell," stepped ashore definitely resolved to finish, in the tongue of which up to his twentieth year he had known hardly a word, the yellowed manuscript of *Almayer's Folly*, his

neglected and desultory companion of some five years of sea wanderings. These are the transitions of his life, the two major improbabilities traced out in *A Personal Record* with the expressed hope that "in the purposely mingled resonance of this double strain a friend here and there will perhaps detect a subtle accord." No hope could well be less exorbitant, the accord here being so far from subtle that, to our intentness at least, it sounds as the ringing centre and fundamental pitch of more other harmonies than we can undertake to find a notation for.

Each of the two steps amounted to expatriation. For both to the Poland of his birth and the sea of his adoption Mr. Conrad's relation was, and remains, a passionate loyalty, the fervour of which none can doubt if he will but consult, in the one case, the parts of *A Personal Record* that envelop, with what tenderness cannot here be described, the memory of earliest years and their associations, even the family traditions of years too remote for memory to reach at first hand; and, in the other case, some scores of passages scattered through half a dozen volumes, all bearing the same testimony to the filial and fraternal piety evoked by the sea, its ships, and its men. The number and sump-

tuous beauty of many such passages is an incidental beguilement to the pen; but what most advances our position is to note that in either case the expatriation was not improvement, but enrichment. Every reader will have noticed in Conrad the enormous number of characters coloured and controlled, for good or evil, by something decisive in the past—oftenest by some loss, some appearance, it may even be, of betrayal; it is not too violent a paradox to say that many of the stories consist of something tremendous in the past to which everything leads forward. This, a point for amplification in its place, serves for the moment to suggest the author's faculty of carrying with him, intensified in significance, whatever he has left materially behind. In reference to a certain grand-uncle, Nicholas B., who in the retreat from Moscow had fed the flickering remnant of his life with the unlovely carcass of a dog of Lithuania, he asks: ". . . why should I, the son of a land which such men as these have turned up with their plowshares and bedewed with their blood, undertake the pursuit of fantastic meals of salt junk and hardtack upon the wide seas?" admitting, as he asks, the difficulty of the answer. But, he urges: "The inner voice may remain true enough in its secret counsel. The

fidelity to a special tradition may last through the events of an unrelated existence, following faithfully, too, the traced way of an inexplicable impulse." Also, "It would take too long to explain the intimate alliance of contradictions in human nature which makes love itself wear at times the desperate shape of betrayal." That his fidelity to the "special tradition" of his origin suffered no relaxation while he was gathering one by one the rustling bits of paper that record his honourable service in ships, he proves later on, when—with both the former loyalties amalgamated in his new service of the craft of letters—his pen traces the inspired intimacies of *A Personal Record* or, in the great novel, *Under Western Eyes*, makes its deadly accurate thrust to the naïve heart of Russian cynicism as no English, and only a singularly detached Polish, pen could have done. For clinching testimony to his other past loyalty preserved untarnished—that, namely, to the sea and its men and their flag, "the Red Ensign—the symbolic, protecting, warm bit of bunting flung wide upon the seas"—one has but to name such titles as *The Nigger of the "Narcissus," The Mirror of the Sea, Romance* (a tale which, it is safe to say, no reader has yet discovered without straightway demanding

that some one else share his discovery), and, best beloved of all by half a generation of readers, *Youth*. Each principal revision of his life was in some sense a circumspection of it; the life of sailors, as he reminds us in one place, is essentially sedentary, that of letters is both sedentary and static; and neither can be made to hold intact all the manifold wealth of such an experience of life as his save under the guardianship of some such paradox as remains our unforgotten text. We shall indeed have fallen far short if we have not defined the prevailing temper of our novelist as the instinct to make capital of the untoward, to discover somehow in every constriction of circumstance a wider freedom. The more hardly pressed upon by the condition of his own narrowing world, the more he has become skilled to "draw up all his strength and sweetness in one ball." During a period of less than twenty years, for example, he has discovered in the English language splendours and sonorities that few born to English have explored since DeQuincey—a capping evidence of some indefinable compulsion to hold in contempt whatever he has not won with prodigious difficulty against odds. Only through a medium of high resistance does he consent to give out his fullness of heat or light.

In a special sense Mr. Conrad has profited by the blend of detachment and intimacy with which, practically alone of his race, he has known and loved the sea. It is an irony as strange as any in his stories that English letters could have waited for a century and a half to adopt from an inland nation a writer who would achieve what Smollett imperfectly suggested: an adequate delineation of the English seaman and a worthy reading in prose fiction of the spirit of the sea. Trunnion and Tom Pipes, Hatchway and Tom Bowling, are real seafarers in more than parlance; Macshane and Crampley are genuine rascals of the sea. But all of them alike are jumping-jacks that abound in the inveterate half-insane comic vivacity of Smollett. What there is of them is authentic sailor. But they are incomplete sailors because incomplete men. Their maker hardly penetrated beyond the farcical aspects of even the death scene of Trunnion. Yet it is eminently conceivable that, of all the English seamen who stepped into fiction, on one leg or two, between Smollett's return from the thwarted Carthage expedition and the year 1895, when Captain Tom Lingard made his unheralded entrance, Commodore Hawser Trunnion is the truest. To state the issue

thus sharply is to suffer the solicitations of a cluster of honourable names, no one of an urgency to stand in this company. The sole writer who could have anticipated Conrad in the direction of showing how sailors think and feel about the sea and ships, the main components of their lives, chose to do more for ships than for sailors, and more for steam than for canvas—as “The Ship That Found Herself” and “M’Andrew’s Hymn” are there to prove. Mr. Joseph Conrad alone, master of an intimacy which disappeared with the coming of steam (it was Belfast who threatened to “chuck going to sea forever and go in a steamer”), has supplied a really impressive group of sailors, at once wholly of the craft and wholly themselves, placed, in steadfast loyalty to a simple ideal, against the background of “the immortal and unresting sea.” For generations the poetry, now worn and defaced, in the phrase “Mistress of the Sea” has waited and sought the Englishman with a pen to translate it into enduring prose—and now he has come—and he is a Pole!

“A week afterward the *Narcissus* entered the chops of the Channel. Under white wings she skimmed low over the blue sea like a great tired bird speeding to its nest. The clouds raced with

her mast-heads; they rose astern enormous and white, soared to the zenith, flew past, and falling down the wide curve of the sky seemed to dash headlong into the sea—the clouds swifter than the ship, more free, but without a home. The coast to welcome her stepped out of space into the sunshine. The lofty headlands trod masterfully into the sea; the wide bays smiled in the light; the shadows of homeless clouds ran along the sunny plains, leaped over valleys, without a check darted up the hills, rolled down the slopes; and the sunshine pursued them with patches of running brightness. On the brows of dark cliffs white lighthouses shone in pillars of light. The Channel glittered like a blue mantle shot with gold and starred by the silver of the capping seas. The *Narcissus* rushed past the headlands and the bays. Outward-bound vessels crossed her track, lying over, and with their masts stripped for a slogging fight with the hard sou'wester. And, inshore, a string of smoking steamboats waddled, hugging the coast, like migrating and amphibious monsters, distrustful of the restless waves.

“At night the headlands retreated, the bays advanced into one unbroken line of gloom. The lights of the earth mingled with the lights of heaven; and above the tossing lanterns of a trawling fleet a great lighthouse shone steadily, such as an enormous riding light burning above a vessel of fabulous dimensions. Below its steady glow the coast, stretching away straight and black, resembled the high side of an indestructible craft riding motionless upon the immortal and unresting sea. The dark land lay alone in the midst of

waters, like a mighty ship bestarred with vigilant lights—a ship carrying the burden of millions of lives—a ship freighted with dross and jewels, with gold and with steel. She towered up immense and strong, guarding priceless traditions and untold suffering, sheltering glorious memories and base forgetfulness, ignoble virtues and splendid transgressions. A great ship! For ages had the ocean battered in vain her enduring sides; she was there when the world was vaster and darker, when the sea was great and mysterious, and ready to surrender the prize of fame to audacious men. A ship mother of fleets and nations! The great flagship of the race; stronger than the storms! and anchored in the open sea.”

One effect in Mr. Conrad's work, sensibly present and localized wherever he treats the sea directly, but also diffused over pages where he treats other subjects, stands in especial need of being explained through his double expatriation. Under all his stories there ebbs and flows a kind of tempered melancholy, a sense of seeking and not finding, that is at once too profound and too impalpable to be accounted for by the sea alone; an unrest become racial and almost savouring of the legendary, as that of the Flying Dutchman. A minor phase of the quality is that Mr. Conrad's landscapes are all really seascapes. Part of his perversity is to find the sea infinite in its variety,

the land poor and limited in comparison; so that many times the land will not answer his purpose until he has rendered it in terms of what it lacks of the sea's aspects. But all his stories are, in a much more far-reaching way than this, what he called the first volume of them: *Tales of Unrest*. They are full, indeed, of the surge of the ocean—"the good, strong sea, the salt, bitter sea, that could whisper to you and roar at you and knock your breath out of you"—but far below that level, in some stratum where the shouting surface voices are stilled, they are full of the surge of an unresting spirit. And this, I think, is a matter that lets down its cables deeper than occupation merely, deeper than courage, honour, glory, all the fine abstractions we live by, into unsounded depths of race and temperament. The patriot exiled from his homeland, itself a sacred lost cause; the seaman exiled from the sea; the citizen of the world searching his own spirit for a habitation not discoverable in the world-purpose—not one of these can explain so tenuous a reality, but all of them together. Mr. Conrad's readers are as one in sensing the quality, insubstantial though it be, beyond the present critical vocabulary. And one wonders whether he himself has not the sense of some such

intangible presence, a little sadly invoked by the strange chances of his life, conjured into gracious existence for sanction of the form in which he has chosen to embody all his aspirations and loyalties, when, speaking of his children and their father, he says: "That which in their grown-up years may appear to the world about them as the most enigmatic side of their natures and perhaps must remain forever obscure even to themselves, will be their unconscious response to the still voice of that inexorable past from which his work of fiction and their personalities are remotely derived."

II

IN *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* one of the earliest of Mr. Conrad's books and the very first to bring him any general acknowledgment, he showed in liveliest reproduction one of the familiar experiences of his immediate past: a powerful and compact alliance created in a ship's fore-castle by the endless implacable fury of the sea. What that book consists of is, briefly, the record of a single voyage from a part of the Far East to London, round the "Cape of Storms"; a timeless voyage of dangers and disasters, surcharged with those omens of death from which sailors' lives are never long free, and rendered unique by one omen in addition, a stalking figure of death in the person of a consumptive negro, James Wait, slowly dying of his malady, and exacting merciless tribute of sympathy "to the moment when he left us in the open sea, shrouded in sailcloth, through the open port. He fascinated us. He would never let doubt die. He overshadowed the ship. Invulnerable in his promise of speedy corruption, he

trampled on our self-respect, he demonstrated to us daily our want of moral courage; he tainted our lives. Had we been a miserable gang of wretched immortals, unhallowed alike by hope and fear, he could not have lorded it over us with a more pitiless assertion of his sublime privilege." But James Wait is not the hero of the tale; he is only "the centre of the ship's collective psychology and the pivot of the action," a grotesque symbol of that death which is the elbow companion of sailors, in whose presence they eat and sleep peacefully, in whose face they fling jests. Making death his accomplice, James Wait heightens the emptiness, the veiled menace, of the narrow circle of the horizon which the ship drags with her through a changeless infinity of days, forcing so the men of the fore-castle into a closer fellowship of necessity.

Here, in the pages that stand more frankly than any others as the author's farewell to his life of the sea, we find his aptest possible image of man's life in the world of space and time. Insofar as he feels himself driven, by "the immense indifference of things," into a brotherhood of nearer intimacies and emphasized meanings, he rewards himself for his renunciation of an ordered universe. In a scheme without a purpose, except as man can supply

one, mankind is the obvious, the only recourse; mankind, not to be censured or rebuked or despised or despaired of, but solely to be enjoyed. In enjoyment, precisely, of one's fellows is the characteristic appeal of Mr. Conrad's attitude. It has perhaps been worth our while to trace him to this outcome, because neither his direction nor his destination has been too commonly made the most of. He has been presented, by those of too ingenious vision, as a satirist of puny man forever at his senseless struggle against forces which can neither be mastered nor comprehended; by others, of vision limited and blurred, as an exponent simply of the thrilling physical adventure. It is rather as a comrade, one of an undismayed company gathered under the ensign of hope for common war on despair, that he requires exhibition of us. His distinguished quality of comradeship is, for such a temperament so derived and nourished, the inevitable outgrowth of a philosophy in which observation, receptivity, and the deliberate cultivation of values are everything. It is by virtue of that quality that he conveys into the people of his making, besides whatever power of individualizing types he exerts to count toward universality, the social divination that makes him contemporary,

“that feeling of unavoidable solidarity, of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world.”

In this concept of a brotherhood of necessity, a common bargain of hope snatched on the very frontiers of despair from an indifferent universe, we have all that need be alleged to account for Mr. Conrad's notion of his accepted task and its justification. Not that any justification is needed: “Even he, the prose artist of fiction, has his place amongst kings, demagogues, priests, charlatans, dukes, giraffes, cabinet ministers, Fabians, bricklayers, apostles, ants, scientists, Kaffirs, soldiers, sailors, elephants, lawyers, dandies, microbes, and constellations of a universe whose amazing spectacle is a moral end in itself.” But there is none the less the maker's attitude toward the thing of his making, his avowal of purpose—even though to have a purpose be but to contribute one more item to the variety of the infinite show. “I love letters,” he says; “I am jealous of their honour and concerned for the dignity and comeliness of their service.” Service! On that word, hauntingly frequent in Conrad, belongs always the emphasis. And service is fellowship in action. His first taking up of

the pen was to turn vanished fellowships of the past into vicarious action. To him in his London boarding-house came, across a gap of years, Almayer, his wife, his daughter, "the rest of that Pantai band . . . full of words and gestures . . . they came with a silent and irresistible appeal." Expostulated with for "wasting the substance of future volumes" in sketch and reminiscence, he protests: ". . . a man who never wrote a line for print till he was thirty-six cannot bring himself to look upon his existence and his experience, upon the sum of his thoughts, sensations, and emotions, upon his memories and his regrets, and the whole possession of his past, as only so much material for his hands. . . . I wanted to pay my tribute to the sea, its ships and its men, to whom I remain indebted for so much that has gone to make me what I am. That seemed to me the only shape in which I could offer it to their shades. There could not be a question of anything else. . . . One's literary life must turn frequently for sustenance to memories and seek discourse with the shades; unless one has made up one's mind to write only in order to reprove mankind for what it is, or praise it for what it is not, or—generally—to teach it how to behave. Being neither quarrelsome, nor

a flatterer, nor a sage, I have done none of these things. . . . I can honestly say that it is a sentiment akin to piety which prompted me to render in words assembled with conscious care the memory of things far distant and of men who had lived." Always that piety is his deepest, most vibrant note. To sound it is one of his several ways of making the utmost of what forces weld men in bonds to each other. Even ships are valuable because they are the instruments of human contact: "made by man," they are "one with man." The circle of the horizon is cruel in its purposelessness but kind in its effect because it contains and compresses the human group. The personal past is a sacred book because in the turning of its leaves rustle the memories of those with whom one has touched hands. The bulkier volume of history is sacred because it perpetuates the kinships of spirit and of blood. And the novel, finally, is justified by its finest of definitions: "a conviction of our fellowmen's existence strong enough to take upon itself a form of imagined life clearer than reality." The characteristic adventure of Mr. Conrad's life has been the discovery of men in their undiscouraged, their obstinate, their sometimes blind and tragic gropings for a hand to

touch in friendship or in love. The characteristic purpose of his fiction is to preserve them as he found them. Finally, the ultimate touch of gracious intimacy, he accepts his readers into the same privileged sodality: "As years go by and the number of pages grows steadily, the feeling grows upon one, too, that one can write only for friends."

As will have appeared from our preliminary instance, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* it is partly in writing about sailors that Mr. Conrad specifically affirms his kind of social values. An unorganized brotherhood, that of the sea, yet stronger than many or most organizations—stronger certainly than the one we call law. There is no law that in certain conditions a captain goes down with his ship; yet for the captain who does otherwise there is left no room on the Seven Seas. Big Brierly, one of the finest of Conrad's ships' officers, suggests the reason: "'We've got all kinds amongst us—some anointed scoundrels in the lot; but, hang it, we must preserve professional decency or we become no better than so many tinkers going about loose. We are trusted. Do you understand?—trusted! . . . The only thing that holds us together is just the name for that kind of decency.'" In hardly any other formal or informal alliance is it so

nearly impossible to "lay the ghost of a fact." There is a tinge of the pride of craft, the fine proprietary esteem of a certain tradition, in Mr. Conrad's appreciation of the social honour upon which rests the freemasonry of sailors. "It is the sea that gives it—the vastness, the loneliness surrounding their dark stolid souls." Hardly anywhere in his writing is there to be found a passage more simply and sensitively personal than the closing sentences of *The Nigger*: "Haven't we, together and upon the immortal sea, wrung out a meaning for our sinful lives? Good-bye, brothers! You were a good crowd. As good a crowd as ever fisted with wild cries the beating canvas of a heavy foresail; or, tossing aloft, invisible in the night, gave back yell for yell to a westerly gale." Not only in such reachings-out of the memory in space does Conrad manifest this species of loyalty: outside the memory of his own service in ships lies the fringe of felt community with a still earlier generation, to which the fancy stretches back through contemplation of such a figure as old Singleton standing at the door of the fore-castle above the sleeping crew. "The men who could understand his silence were gone—those men who knew how to exist beyond the pale of life and within sight of eternity. . . .

They were the everlasting children of the mysterious sea. Their successors are the grown-up children of a discontented earth. They are less naughty, but less innocent; less profane, but perhaps also less believing; and if they have learned how to speak, they have also learned how to whine. But the others were strong and mute; they were effaced, bowed and enduring, like stone caryatides that hold up in the night the lighted halls of a resplendent and glorious edifice. They are gone now—and it does not matter. The sea and the earth are unfaithful to their children: a truth, a faith, a generation of men goes—and is forgotten, and it does not matter! Except, perhaps, to the few of those who believed the truth, confessed the faith—or loved the men.” To the ever so faintly ironic melancholy of which we propose to add nothing—there being surely nothing that comment *could* add without the risk of detraction.

Important as the children of the sea have been to Mr. Conrad, it is easy (and, in periodical criticism thus far, fairly usual) to overstate their proportionate part in his work. Of all his volumes, the series of sketches called *The Mirror of the Sea* and two very short books, *The Nigger* and *Typhoon*,

concern themselves almost exclusively with life afloat; to which one should add three or four other tales that appear as members of groups—notably, *Youth* and *The Secret Sharer*. For the rest his work, even when it deals with seafarers, is either of the land wholly, as *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*, or amphibious, as *Lord Jim*, *The End of the Tether*, and *Chance*. A recent critic, Mr. Frederic Taber Cooper, confesses his preference for the stories of the sea. “The stories of the harbour,” he says in explanation, “are redolent of physical and moral decay: ‘Ships rot, men go to the devil.’ Throughout Conrad’s stories he shows us man fighting a losing fight; but at sea it is a physical one, and on land it is a moral one.” Either that the fight in the sea stories is primarily physical, or that the general tendency of our some six thousand pages is to show man vanquished, the present view is not prompted to maintain against illustrations such as *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* and *Victory*. But it is true that the tales of life afloat involve the forces that unite men in a democracy of endeavour, whereas the tales of the harbour involve the ones that drag them apart into social anarchy. Assuredly it is in the episodes of struggle with the

sea that Mr. Conrad shows man doing most to prevail over "the indestructible loneliness that surrounds, envelops, clothes every human soul from the cradle to the grave, and, perhaps, beyond." It is, admittedly, in the forecabin that man is most secure in his possession of "the community of hopes and fears."

But to show man insecure in his possession of fellowship is not of necessity to lose the sense of its prime value. And—one more consequence perhaps of our author's expatriation and ensuing half-conscious sense of struggle for a place to be made or won—when he steps ashore he goes at his statement of social values from the angle that another might find least to the purpose: the angle, that is, of the outcast. Mr. Conrad performs no task more faithfully than his analysis of the man who, by accident or his own act, is cut off from his natural associations, and whose whole way of existing and thinking is traceable to his being so cut off. Examples throng. Falk, who once ate human flesh rather than starve, thereafter made himself into a sort of dehumanized monster simply by thinking of himself in monstrous terms. Captain Whalley destroyed his self-esteem and the honour of his calling by undertaking a voyage

after his eyesight had grown dim; and his loss, in the ensuing disaster, of the life that had lost its meaning is the merciful rather than tragic outcome of one of the greatest of the tales, *The End of the Tether*. Razumov, the anarchist hero of *Under Western Eyes*, uttered in one sharp sentence the tragedy of destructive revolution from the revolutionist's point of view: "Men like me leave no posterity." The English doctor in *Nostromo* would remain an enigma, if one had only the horizontal view of him, in time present. But we are given the vertical view, we plumb his past. We see him as a man who, having once at the unbearable extreme of physical torture betrayed his friends, hates himself thereafter just in proportion to his natural love of his fellows. He hates, after all, not the world, but his own imprisonment in it, and the displacement of all the former human contacts by his solitary shame. *Typhoon*, of all the shorter pieces, comes nearest to the development of background or atmosphere alone, approaching in that particular "The Merry Men" of Stevenson: yet the focal point of *Typhoon* remains the personality of the strangely impassive master mariner who, by whatever blend of lacking imagination and past unbroken luck and sublime stupidity,

is set apart irrecoverably from his own kind by his incapacity for ordinary cautious fear. Against the fury of the China Sea, its characteristic tempest made personal, a trampling, rending giant; against the scores of Chinese coolies struggling for silver pieces in the half dark—against background and action rolled into one—we see that impervious figure, Captain MacWhirr, incapable of alarm or of sympathy with others in their alarm. The typhoon which splinters the ship never finds that fontanel whereby fear enters the human imagination; and MacWhirr remains to the end, through his preposterous coolness, as alien to his fellows as lesser men become through panic. The pathos of his hopeless heroism is condensed in his one quaint speech about the ship: “‘I wouldn’t like to lose her.’” “He was spared that annoyance,” adds the author, in delicately ironical characterization. The reasoning behind these and some still more important like cases seems to be: A man’s natural place among his own kind, his status as of a group or guild, is the most valuable and necessary part of his life; and whatever breaks his contacts or sets a barrier between him and the rest of humanity, whatever places him at odds with the society of his equals, is by conse-

quence his supreme tragedy. Hence the most profitable of all situations in which he can be encountered is, for the novelist whose task must be to decipher the central mystery of character, the situation of the outcast, in which alone it is impossible to simulate strength or hide weakness. . . . There is no need to prolong illustration beyond what will show Mr. Conrad's process as the selection, most often, of ordinary characters, presently to be revealed in extraordinary crises. In the analysis, under applied pressure, of types originally comparable to a score of folk one might have known, he acquaints one with latent valour and virtue, with hidden deficiency such as one can never know except in rare moments of stress; and one can but accept the result for the quintessence of romantic realism. The display is of commonest qualities in crucial and unfamiliar action. Mr. Conrad's people were born to be common, but, pressing and transmuting them under the weight of many surcharged atmospheres, he has kept them from becoming commonplace.

His grasp of the calamity of the man fallen out of his background involves one important corollary, a profound sense of racial identities and of the potential tragedy in inter-racial contacts. He

began with this sense in *Almayer's Folly*. The pivot of Almayer's destiny was his consenting to marry Joanna, a Malay foundling and the adoptive daughter of his patron Lingard. He lived to see himself hated and spat upon by Joanna, who said bitterly to her own daughter: "Forget that you ever looked at a white face; forget their words; forget their thoughts. For they speak lies. And they think lies, because they despise us that are better than they are, but not so strong." That half-breed daughter, Nina, lived to be morally torn between her white father and her Malay lover. Leaving Almayer at last to the torture of his remembered loss, a solitary man with a dead past and no future, she said to him: "I am not of your race. Between your people and me there is also a barrier that nothing can remove. You ask why I want to go, and I ask you why I should stay?" Yet she was only half right, for her lover felt the same inexorable barrier between her and himself, "something invisible that stood between them. . . . No desire, no longing, no effort of will or length of life could destroy this vague feeling of their difference." Still more poignant is the case of Aissa, facing Lingard as he tries to persuade her against her consuming pas-

favourite motif of Mr. Kipling: the physical and moral degeneration of the white man in the continent of black or brown men. In "Heart of Darkness" the individual hero, though real, is so hooded in his own symbolic purport that, as a person merely, we do not need to see him until the tale is two thirds told. His mind made the stage for the condensed drama of two continents, the European is shown drained, diseased, a prey to madness and unutterable horror and death, a witness to the ghastly something in the secret of race that disintegrates all blood but its own. The intellectual basis of the Pantai books is the failure to understand that secret. Similarly, *Under Western Eyes* is a structure reared on the inability of Western Europe to understand the cynicism that gores all Russia between the extremes of autocracy and anarchy. "Heart of Darkness" presents the opposite tragedy, the too intimate understanding of things across the gulf of race. Kurtz, initiated into monstrous and unnameable rites of savages, loses all his bearings in space and time, and slips back into a twilight of chaos like that before mind dawned on the body's bestiality. . . . Evidently Mr. Conrad's philosophy of race anticipates no millennial community wherein the peoples of the

earth shall solve their differences by having none. Years ago he wrote prophetically, in a magazine essay still uncollected, of "the German eagle with the Prussian head"; and the stories, in every instance, present race as an insoluble enigma, wrapped often, as in *Youth*, with shining vestures of romance, always most alluring of mysteries for the distant beholder secure in his own heritage, but in the nearer view insidious, corrosive, deathly.

So much of Mr. Conrad's work turns, in one way or another, on the fate of outcasts that the reader is least prepared to discover in the novel *Nostromo* the one greatest embodiment of his peculiar distinctions. For *Nostromo* differs from his other work in no single particular so largely as in its substitution of the direct approach for the indirect. Every one of his stories, it is to be hoped will have transpired, is social in its implication; but even in novels such as *Chance* or *Under Western Eyes*, which give a partial portrait of men in civilized masses, the practical process consists in standing with the outcast who hammers at the wall shutting him out from his own kind. The wall may be either a solid social or moral law, as in *Lord Jim*, or

the most insubstantial tissue of temperament, as in *Typhoon* and "Il Conde," but the point of view is always on the same side of it. In *Nostromo* alone the point of view, shifted to the other side, ranges over the spectacle of a complete and coherent society, a panorama of commerce and government, with all its cross-purposes and failures to understand itself, its final illusory approximation of order. Costaguana, the seaboard country of that tale, is ostensibly a South American tropical republic farcically and, were it not for Mexico, incredibly misgoverned; a "Treasure House of the World" lying between the Cordilleras and the Placid Gulf as though expressly for exploitation by foreign capital. In the novel Costaguana is the world in miniature, with all the world's tumult of conflicting voices that babble or shriek or whisper—love and jealousy, ambition and patriotism, generosity and greed. All the forces of an intricate civilization are there: factions within the state, industrial unrest, the various duels of class and sex; the instinctive and irrepressible force, too, of public opinion, of social evolution, that solves the problems of to-day precisely as though they had not just been fought about, only to propound new and more imperative problems for the morrow. At

the latest glimpse Costaguana is a smooth-running industrial mechanism through the pulsation of which sounds a characteristically modern note, the suppressed menace of "Labour" newly conscious of its strength against capital still unaware of a force more enduring than expediency. Elsewhere, we have said and seen, Mr. Conrad shows men fallen out of their background: here he shows, in elaborate and detailed expansion, one of those backgrounds out of which they fall. Not that the outcast does not enter the pages of this exception among Conrad's books: simply, we view him, when he does enter, through the eyes of those from whom he is severed and from the angle of the law that casts him out.

It is part of the grandeur of scale in *Nostromo* that the rôle of the outcast, without which no story could at all adequately exhibit our author's type of struggle against odds, is played not so much by a person as by a monstrous and anti-social vice, a superhuman moral quality of which the human terms of the drama are variously and ingeniously illustrational. *Nostromo* is the epic of avarice, an outcast among moral qualities. The motif is set in the first chapter, which recounts the local legend of two gringos who perished on a bleak promontory in

a hunt for gold. Then follows the story of Charles Gould's silver mine, a concession to his father from the government. It was this mine that cankered so many with greed and destroyed so many innocent lives. It had embittered and all but literally killed the father of Charles Gould. The son began as a more than ordinarily quixotic young Englishman; after his soul became encrusted with silver he was no better than an automaton of inhuman efficiency. The story of his wife, one of the great women of Conrad, is silent, repressed tragedy, told at its shortest in a single sentence: "Mrs. Gould had no silver mine to look after." Presently, when the San Tomé mine had grown to be the measure of Costaguanan prosperity, came the inevitable revolution, in which avarice masked itself as patriotism. All the factions (there were three) made pretension to principles: actually, they were fighting for property—which, after all the turmoil and bloodshed, characteristically did not so much as change owners. Avarice laid its shrivelling hand, too, on many brave hearts in which the quality itself had no home. There was Giuseppe Viola, a patriot Garibaldino of spirit unconquerable and leonine as Garibaldi's own: he lay at the last "alone, rugged, undecayed, like an old oak up-

rooted by a treacherous gust of wind." There were his two daughters, both dragged down by the same clutch. There was Martin Decoud, volatile and easy-going, of unlimited energy to fight with the foremost or even, so long as he had no time to think beforehand, to preach with the most passionate, but of no capacity for believing in anything, even in himself. When he died on the islet where avarice had left him to watch a pile of silver, something died, too, in the heart of Antonia Avellanos, another of Conrad's great and quiet-souled women. And, most fascinating of all the figures that slink or stalk through those six hundred pages, there was "Nostromo" himself, Captain Gian' Battista Fidanza the "incorruptible"—a stalking figure, chief of the Navigation Company's longshoremen, whose colossal naïve egotism resisted every great crisis, but absurdly crumbled after his responsibility was discharged. "Here was a man, Decoud reflected, that seemed as though he would have preferred to die rather than deface the perfect form of his egoism." That egoism, his need of being needed, takes the place of every virtue. So long as men cannot get along without him, so long as he can shine in men's eyes, he cares for no pay. He will let a dancing girl of the town cut off the silver

buttons of his coat when its pockets are emptiest for the applause of his inferiors. He will risk his life for days on the open sea in a small boat loaded with treasure, or in a solitary four-hundred-mile ride across the mountains to bring the patriot army to the rescue, in order to make debtors of those whom he does not love. But the crowd must applaud, the debt must be acknowledged. The only flaw in Nostromo's honesty is the suspicion that he is suspected. Through that imagined affront to his vanity avarice oddly enters in the garb of revenge. Resolved to "grow rich slowly," he appropriates, ingot by ingot, the silver hoard which all but himself and Decoud had supposed to lie at the bottom of the Golfo Placido—until the treasure has appropriated him, grimly turning loyalty, courage, honour, love itself, to its own shadowy purpose. In the end Linda Viola cried out his name before she threw herself into the impenetrable night of the Gulf. "In the true cry of love and grief that seemed to ring aloud from Punta Mala to Azuera and away to the bright line of the horizon, the genius of the magnificent capitaz de cargadores dominated even after death the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love." That outcome is spoken of as "another of Nostro-

mo's successes, the greatest, the most enviable, the most sinister of all." But in the impersonal and larger meaning which adds itself to our sense of the author's social and socializing vision it is the ultimate, the most sinister success of avarice alone. Directly or indirectly, each of those lives is determined by a precious metal. The hoard of silver is omnipresent, sinister like a conspiracy, grim like a fate, haunting like a regret. It determines the proportion and grouping of narrative elements, becoming so in *Nostromo* what the book *Almayer's Folly* is in *A Personal Record*, or the house "Almayer's Folly" in Mr Conrad's first-published book. Its significance emerges sharply from the unflinching recognition of Mrs. Gould, whose vision was not to be duped, as her husband's had been, by the surface fiction of a success more to be dreaded than any failure.

"She saw the San Tomé mountain hanging over the Campo, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy, more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst government, ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness. He did not see it. He could not see it. It was not his fault. He was perfect, perfect; but she would never have him to herself. Never; not for one short hour altogether to herself

in this old Spanish house she loved so well! Incorrigible, the last of the Corbélans, the last of the Avellanos, the doctor had said, but she saw clearly the San Tomé mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds; mastering the energetic spirit of the son as it had mastered the lamentable weakness of the father. A terrible success for the last of the Goulds. The last! She had hoped for a long, long time, that perhaps—— But no! There were to be no more. An immense desolation, the dread of her own continued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaeo. With a prophetic vision she saw herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal of life, of love, of work—all alone in the Treasure House of the World. The profound, blind, suffering expression of a painful dream settled on her face with its closed eyes. In the indistinct voice of an unlucky sleeper, lying passive in the toils of a merciless nightmare, she stammered aimlessly the words: “‘Material interests.’”

Thus, with the actual substance of Mr. Conrad's stories, whether they approach the whole burnished shield of human solidarity or its shattered tarnished shield, the question is always somehow of solidarity. It remains to be pointed out that in one important particular the constant resort to the story told in talk by one member of a group, the pure technique or device of construction is chosen to the same end. Criticism has too often assumed as the

only utility of this resort what is indeed its first obvious utility: the attainment of a direct contact between the reader and the reciter who possesses the most authentic information, the eye- or ear-witness of the event. In "Falk," "Amy Foster," "Heart of Darkness," "Gaspar Ruiz," and a half-dozen others, Mr. Conrad enjoys to the full that advantage of contact established and direct leverage exerted. But undoubtedly he recognizes, too, that such authenticity is precisely what the writer can most readily appropriate to himself. If one has heard a recital in the first person, what more comfortable simply than to repeat it in the first person, doing away with the extra machinery of an audience within the story? But Mr. Conrad, so far from repeating stories that have been told to him, is apparently putting into the mouths of other men such stories as he has made or (allowing for an instant the sense of gossip to penetrate that of criticism) all conveniently lived—and, doing it, at whatever prejudice to rigid economy, expressly to acquire the extra machinery of an audience within the stories. Once acquired, the listeners become more than passive. Their very recipience takes on the dynamic quality of an effort shared and thereby intensified.

Whether heard in question and comment, or seen simply in acquiescence, they are an acid test to the tale and of its sincerity. In those men whom the author can reach he studies the effect of the story on the invisible reader whom he can reach vicariously, by indirection—as though he dared not let certain experiences out of his possession until they have undergone the scrutiny of his own half-silent men. The story *Youth*, for example, superficially considered, is the record simply of a young seaman's first voyage to the Far East—the accidents, the innumerable obstacles and delays, the destruction of the ship by fire, the arrival at last of the ship's boats in an unknown harbour, the awaking at dawn to a first view of the Orient, its flow and its colour, its blue sea and sky, its brown humanity. But the magic of *Youth* is more than its palpable authenticity, more than even the fervour of the telling. The story exceeds its own fine fitness as a lyric rapture of abstract youth; it is the threnody of a past that was beautiful, and is vanished. ““I remember my youth and the feeling that will never come back any more—the feeling that I could last forever, outlast the sea, the earth, and all men; the deceitful feeling that lures us on to joys, to perils, to love, to vain effort—to death; the

triumphant conviction of strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust, the glow in the heart that with every year grows dim, grows cold, grows small, and expires—and expires, too soon—before life itself.’” The speaker is Marlow, now no longer young; the hearers are four men who sit with him round a table. They also have known the sea, loved it, and left it. And it is in the last sentences of all, where Marlow’s story and the inherent “fellowship of the craft” strike the same response from the heart of each, that *Youth* consummates its effect; that silent response of theirs aligning into a single undeviating mood every detail and circumstance of the narrative—a fusion none the less triumphant for happening to get itself effected outside the story proper. The account moves those men and, so far as the fact goes, the reader with them. But if that were all, we should be offering an aimless tribute, the purely emotional appeal having been measurably overrated in English fiction since *Pamela*. The preëminent distinction of *Youth* is that it moves men *together*. Read aloud, it quite literally and physically draws the hearers in one by one, until they are indistinguishably lost, and the reader with them, in a single tense personality. There is no

threat of death for a tale that applies to all men a common measure: it will transcend the widest sea horizon, even the language that gave it birth.

Half the discussion of Mr. Conrad's way of getting his stories told in talk is necessarily the discussion of Marlow, known to us in *Youth*, "Heart of Darkness," and almost certainly, though unnamed, in "Falk," as well as in two novels separated by fourteen years, *Lord Jim* and *Chance*. Marlow is, of course, a subdivision of Conrad's personality, objectified for the added sociability of enabling the author to converse with himself, walking audibly round his subject and examining it from both sides at once. Marlow, consenting to be graciously interminable, conducts the story with all the solicitude of a professional guide, in addition to all the amenity of an ideal host who knows well that his guests have come to hear him talk, not to be heard themselves. He is a mild, tolerant figure, mellowed and faintly cynical, a raconteur born and self-made. He has seen life under many aspects in strange places, has lived and been beset, had "to strike and to fend off." But in general he has remained an amused, indulgent, shrewd, and sympathetic spectator, a fine instance of "unwearied self-forgetful attention to every phase of

the living universe." "No," he says, "I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done." Whenever he speaks our interest is not more in the story than in his process of excavating the story and its meaning. For to him stories have meanings: that is the excuse for his existence. Not less truly than his maker he finds enlightened spectatorship the chief business of living. His ideal in human relationships is intimate sympathy based on intuition and openness of dealing: "there is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies." Yet the dark phases of character exert on him an irresistible fascination because they mean something that is not too easily seen through; something that his inborn quiet curiosity can sense as a challenge, to be taken up by his extraordinary genius for finding objects of sympathy in the unlikeliest places. In his triple armour of self-knowledge, insight into human oddities, and a full quota of practical ability, he goes about his trade of connoisseur in men and happenings, himself one of the most personable and ingratiating men in fiction. Still not to forget that, in this realm of transferred ideas in which the same essence can be the teller and the tale, the jester and the jest, Marlow is the largest part of

Conrad that could be compressed into the limits of a single credible figure, we may forthwith define both the maker and the man as being the incarnate principle of solidarity which we have tried to present under various guises—the instinct of comradeship made flesh.

III

AT THIS point must end, without pretension to completeness, our account of the intellectual foundation of Mr. Conrad's work, his general attitude of mind, "the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation." To have come only thus belatedly upon what, as readers, we discover first of all, the contour and design of the superstructure visibly reared on that foundation in one after another of the books, is expressly to have redeemed the promise (or, in a less charitable view, the threat) to name the terms of his peculiar story in reversed order. And if discussion at the outset of generalities so wide seem in itself to yield only a barren return, what shall be the answer except that, in this case more than another, the specific details become most fruitful in the presence of just such preliminaries? It is on Mr. Conrad's broad humanity and warmth of temperament that everything else hangs or hinges; and to analyze his "art" aside from its firm dependence is to hint a deplorable pedantic re-

moteness from life, a message directed only to some fancied élite or, as he says, "the ineffable company of pure æsthetes." Whereas, it is precisely the meaning of our whole adventure to approach his distinguished qualities of craftsmanship in the knowledge of what larger thing supports, indeed calls them into existence. To miss the whole is to miss the reason for the parts—the whole being here a philosophy of discovered purposes and values in life at its largest, and the parts a score of ingenious tricks for reducing those values to the order and symmetry of art. It is this interpenetration of reason and result that sweeps aside for us the accredited fashion of treating a writer's philosophy as though it were a kind of sauce to be poured over the cooked dish at the instant of serving or even, at will, tactfully refused. We find it rather the clear invisible medium in which the various ingredients of action, character, setting, mood, and what-not exist in even and complete solution. As we admit, then, to the prepared and lighted chamber of our interest the unnamed guest kept waiting overlong at the door, with more to confide to our intent curiosity than we shall be able during any one hour to take completely in, we can justify the delay on the

score of a more important presence, come to urge a claim to which every other is subordinate. The unnamed secondary visitor is, of course, no other than method, design, technique, style in that narrower sense which is not the man but the inflection of the man's voice—or, as we like once more formidably to put it, "art."

To define artistic method as simply the rationale or the expediency of getting the artist's largest purpose expressed, leaving so all emphasis on the imperative why and none on the incidental how, is equally to demolish unnumbered fancies for artistic theory as a cult or fetish, making its own sacred laws and inherently compelling veneration, and that other strangely persistent fancy for refusing on any terms the intellectual account of art. Not for the reader who judges a piece of fiction *in vacuo*, as an assemblage of such and such elements of proportion, colour, contrast, or crisis, so and so patterned for an æsthetic effect, and in its utility essentially "unmoral." has the present adventure any meaning; nor yet for his opposite, the reader whose reflective faculties are dormant while his emotional are at their keenest, and who holds it affectation to concede anything to reflection or analysis. It is to be noted in passing, as of the nature

of things, that both attitudes are the annihilation of criticism, since one insists on doing all the artist's thinking for him in advance, and the other on making the artist do all the thinking for both parties to the relation. Still less, then, can we submit here to a common measure with that reader, representing the lowest pitch of the casual, who is perturbed to discover that by some ludicrous mistake he has sought pleasure of a serious worker with ideas about his work, and for whom pleasures decrease with their intellectual sanction. If, on the other hand, Mr. Conrad can be made to signify something to such as discover in fiction a challenge to their own powers, an opportunity for the rich creative riot of infinite kinds of appreciation working together over the prepared ground of what the artist offers—among them not least the appreciation of method—then by every consideration the task should be attempted. What as readers we have most notably to thank Mr. Conrad for is his promoting us to a rank of some dignity. He compels his public to read him creatively, with mind intensely operative, and, having done that, to read him again. On this the ultimate and only exacting test, our will or lack of will to retrace, and its direct and proportional obligation

to conscious method, Mr. Henry James has a word, partly in definite reference to Conrad, and every way applicable to him: “. . . the simplest description of the cry of the novel when sincere . . . is as an appeal to us when we have read it once to read it yet again. *That* is the act of consideration; no other process of considering approaches this for directness, so that anything short of it is virtually not to consider at all. . . . The effect of consideration, we need scarce remark, is to light for us in a work of art the hundred questions of how and why and whither, and the effect of these questions, once lighted, is enormously to thicken and complicate . . . the amused state produced in us by the work. The more our amusement multiplies its terms the more fond and the more rewarded consideration becomes. . . . Then it is that notes of intention become more present or more absent; then it is that we take the measure of what we have already called our effective provision. The bravest providers and designers show at this point something still in store which only the second rummage was appointed to draw forth. To the variety of these ways of not letting our fondness fast is there not practically no limit?—and

of the arts, the devices, the graces, the subtle secrets applicable to such an end what presumptuous critic shall pretend to draw the list? Let him for the moment content himself with saying that many of the most effective are mysteries, precisely, of method, or that even when they are not most essentially and directly so it takes method, blest method, to extract their soul and to determine their meaning." Partly for just such reasons, and partly because, as we have alleged, our author means most when surveyed backward, in the reflection of generalities not seen in the first glimpse, it is better to have thought about than to have read him, and better still to have reread. Only with such reconsideration does he yield the full fine flavour of the substance which method, at its nicest and most ingenious development, must distil and clarify.

If one feels drawn to ask what that all-important substance is, or, in other words, what is the general definition of such art as we have to test, where shall one look for answer if not to Mr. Conrad's larger definition of life as a supremely engrossing spectacle, and his insistence that the whole duty of man is to be engrossed by it? The acceptance of life on such conditions is itself an enlargement

of art as we shall find ourselves constrained to describe the latter—life itself making necessities of selection, exclusion, emphasis, all the refinements of an enlightened taste, and of that conscience which is the mainspring of all the other necessities. The magical words in Conrad, not less in the later creative stage than in the earlier active, are conscience, service, fidelity, the moral, or what is the same thing, social emotions which fate has put in play upon the massed and problematic spectacle of existence; and what his conscience makes of life as a whole differs from what it makes of art only in the one crucial particular: that the conscience of art is “gifted with a voice”—that voice the varying intonations of which we stand committed to study. Life itself consists of a series of phases of “the living universe reflected in our consciousness,” each phase seen through the mood which our conscience invokes; fiction, too, consists, when most sincere, of the same relation of phase to mood, translated into visible symbols of the voice and accentuated by the infinity of arts, devices, graces, and subtle secrets which make up the impressive total of method. “To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing

phase of life, is only the beginning of the task. The task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes and in the light of a sincere mood"—thus one article of an early confession of faith never for an instant relinquished. Nothing more is needed to fix and formulate the notion of the artistic web or pattern, not as determined by isolated "technique," with its arbitrary fitness and expediency, but as the ready responsiveness of a plastic substance to the mould of life—life, we mean still, as scanned through our author's temperament and its derivative, his theory. So ready is that responsiveness, so fluid the substance, that we rediscover, divested of all its ancient brazen fatuity and sounded with a quite new chime, the note of Art for Art's sake—in familiar usage too rapid for tribute, too trifling for blasphemy. "It is evident that he who, rightly or wrongly, holds by the convictions expressed above cannot be faithful to any one of the temporary formulas of his craft. The enduring part of them—the truth which each only imperfectly veils—should abide with him as the most precious of his possessions, but they all: Realism, Romanticism, Naturalism,

even the unofficial sentimentalism (which, like the poor, is exceedingly difficult to get rid of), all these gods must, after a short period of fellowship, abandon him—even on the very threshold of the temple—to the stammerings of his conscience and to the outspoken consciousness of the difficulties of his work. In that uneasy solitude the supreme cry of Art for Art itself loses the exciting ring of its apparent immorality. It sounds far off. It has ceased to be a cry, and is heard only as a whisper, often incomprehensible, but at times and faintly encouraging.” Art for Art, Art for Life, Life for Art—the terms are practically interchangeable in the transmuting glow of a personality that renders all things in terms of the social conscience and its entrained virtues of service and fidelity. Not in our younger generation surely is there so consistent a rapprochement between life and its decorative miniature self, art, or so clear a case of the endless ingenuities of art used so exclusively to the single end of disentangling and making clear the heart of truth.

If we pass over for a moment the prodigal generosity of what Mr. Conrad means by a “phase of life,” it is only to discover in the other half of his

definition the "sincere mood," still another renewal of the case for compression, the representation of much in little. His inexorable candour finds its result of highest general importance in his emotional restraint, a species of self-control through which he makes a guarded attitude contain and imply all the spiritual stress and turbulence of man's most unguarded moments. That part of his restraint which is on the lower plane of taste shows in the composition of his finest women, such as Mrs. Gould, Antonia Avellanos, Natalie Haldin in *Under Western Eyes*, or Flora de Barral in *Chance*—women who, however much or well they speak, give the effect of inarticulacy because they keep so much behind for the intuition to catch or miss according to its desert. Hardly in the whole list of his people is there to be found a hysterical character of importance. He is as truly the aristocrat among rough and, as we fatuously say, "common" lives as Mr. Henry James is the aristocrat among lives reared under an exquisite human horticulture; and the ideally right reserve, with whatever debilities accompanied in this or that instance, is the fine flower of aristocracy everywhere. Mr. Conrad manifests it at the outset on the plane of personal inclination merely,

in the choice of characters to be portrayed objectively. But it involves and explains more at the higher pitch where, in the subjective treatment of his characters and material, it interlocks with his conscience. Consistently he omits the specious, the meretricious. One of many examples: near the end of *Nostromo* he proves his contempt for the ordinary claptrap of suspense by throwing away his most engaging opportunity for the exact sort of adventurous narration he executes with most sweep and dash. Instead of stage-managing the last thrilling exploit of *Nostromo*, the four-hundred-mile journey through a wild and hostile country, he puts the account, some twenty years stale, into the mouth of Captain Mitchell, who has survived only to become a babbling dotard. The particular kind of suspense lost is not our concern, which is with the still wilder adventure of *Nostromo's* character. For that the ground is prepared. All that remains is to clear it of the revolution which has already sunk to the level of so much literary rubbish. In the prattling reminiscence of the worthy captain Mr. Conrad sweeps it brusquely aside, where another would have made it what, in terms of stirring event alone, it positively clamours to be, the crisis of

the whole. The town, the revolution, the struggling factions, the flush of the sunrise on Higuerota, the black void of the Placid Gulf, all the rush and recoil of the mighty drama, have been conjured into existence only that they may vanish at a touch; the thriving city of a hundred years and half a thousand pages is blown out of the panorama to make room for Gian' Battista, the outcast of Genoa, and the single scarlet flower of his love. . . . Still more than by such omission, however, the author manifests his restraint in the treatment of what is included. The deepest intensities of emotion he leaves to his characters, himself never laughing or weeping over them, but exhibiting at the one extreme a playful and often ironic humour, and at the other a still milder melancholy also often tinged with irony. Partly, he confesses, in repudiating the charge of indifference or "*secheresse du cœur*," his reason is diffidence, "the regard for one's own dignity which is inseparably united with the dignity of one's work"—there being "nothing more humiliating than to see the shaft of one's emotion miss the mark either of laughter or tears," as it *may* do however accurate the aim. Still more, he suspects in any effort to display the extremes of

feeling "the debasing touch" of that insincerity which he abhors. If we consciously cultivate the power of moving others, "we must deliberately allow ourselves to be carried away beyond the bounds of our normal sensibility . . . like an actor who raises his voice on the stage above the pitch of natural conversation." ". . . the danger lies in the writer becoming the victim of his own exaggeration, losing the exact notion of sincerity, and in the end coming to despise truth itself as something too cold, too blunt for his purpose. . . . From laughter and tears the descent is easy to snivelling and giggles." And presently comes the most astounding word of all, nothing less than a flat repudiation of what, in English, where the sentimentalists have ever been better understood than the ironists, may be called the accepted province of the novel: "A historian of hearts is not a historian of emotions." Still less is he a historian of surface aspects merely. He passes over the emotions only to pass behind them—not to content himself with less, but to compass more. ". . . he penetrates further, restrained as he may be, since his aim is to reach the very fount of laughter and tears." Not the manifestation, then, but the hidden source, is the

artist's truth, to which every surface aspect is no more than the index. In this quest for something more strong and more enduring than emotionalism Conrad resembles one imagined character of his own race, Mr. Hewlett's Prince Morosine, who "never allowed himself raptures" but "was always seeking the *roots of rapture*." Conrad himself states or implies the same thought in a score of passages. "Art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect." "The task . . . is to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth—disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment." If the artist succeed "you will find there, according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand and, perhaps, also, that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask." The kingdom of what we feel is deserted only for the empire of what we are; the artist's authority seeks not less but more than we are used to conceive. Secure in "the only one of our feelings for which it is

impossible to become a sham"—"resignation open-eyed, conscious, and informed by love"—we find it stands for the entire range of feelings; for it alone has got beyond and outside them all. Such resolute and vigorous resignation is the general import of the sincere mood which Mr. Conrad applies to one after another specific instance or phase of life.

The mood of resignation and the reserve that forswears the facile appeal of surface realities on behalf of profound and intimate moral truth find an impressive embodiment in *Lord Jim*. The hero of that first of Marlow's recitals was the exact spiritual converse of Captain MacWhirr, whom we have already seen as not having enough imagination to be afraid. Lord Jim had not enough imagination to be afraid of fear. He was a normally brave, normally capable, somewhat more than normally unhumorous and inarticulate young Englishman who had dreamed for himself futures of knightly heroism. But when his crucial test came his merits had not the good fortune to overlap and hide his deficiencies, as the merits of far inferior men sometimes do in a crisis. He became the victim of an inhuman witticism, a stupendous practical joke staged by man and nature in collabo-

ration. Somewhere out in the calm immensity of the Arabian Sea the *Patna* steamed over a waterlogged derelict—"like a snake crawling over a log," Jim reported afterward at the official inquiry. Three of her officers quitted her in the night, leaving eight hundred human cattle sleeping aboard. At the last instant Jim, the second officer, went with them. His quaint admixture of motive and impulse only Conrad can illumine; but clearly it was nearer to absent-mindedness than to cowardice in the conventional sense—for Jim was simply not a coward. The fiasco was such a lamentable affair as can happen, through an inexplicable lapse of the normal faculties, to even the bravest man, provided his bravery is without the complete balance of a moral principle. The ignoble four were picked up the next day, with their graphic story of a ship gone down. But the rusted and sagging forward bulkhead of the *Patna*, the collapse of which had seemed a matter of seconds, miraculously held, and the ship, minus her officers, was towed into port. That, of course, was the end of Jim so far as the world was concerned; but for Conrad it is only the beginning of a new Jim otherwise unthinkable, who fled from harbour to harbour of the Far East, hounded by his blasted reputation

and keeping barely in advance of it. Later, in Patusan, an island world behind the world, among people not of his race, he became once more a figure of unimpaired prestige. At last the grotesque chances of his life gave him the boon of a death which, with every surface appearance of disgrace, was yet the consummation of his honour. He had given a safe-conduct to a band of freebooters who had penetrated his adoptive country. On their passage down-river to the sea, which they disgraced, they fell upon the chief's son, Dain Waris, and killed him and his retinue in cold blood. To Doramin, the aged and infirm chief, it could only seem as though Jim, "Tuan" Jim, had committed a deliberate betrayal. In a fatalistic despair, coupled with an inexorable and haunting expiatory passion, Jim tore himself away from the woman he loved and from his remaining chance of flight, to walk with undaunted egoism into the mourning circle of women and warriors and meet his death.

"And that's the end. He passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic. Not in the wildest days of his boyish visions could he have seen the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success! For it may well be that in the short moment of his last

proud and unflinching glance he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side.

But we can see him, an obscure conqueror of fame, tearing himself out of the arms of a jealous love at the sign, at the call of his exalted egoism. He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct. Is he satisfied—quite, now, I wonder? We ought to know. He is one of us—and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy? Was I so very wrong, after all? Now he is no more, there are days when the reality of his existence comes to me with an immense, with an overwhelming force; and yet, upon my honour, there are moments, too, when I believe him to have been only a disembodied spirit astray amongst the passions of this earth—surrendering himself faithfully to the claim of his own world of shades.”

One writer of some seeming authority has described *Lord Jim* as a development of “the philosophic problem of cowardice and its retribution.” Such an account, unamplified as it stands, falls short of the right comprehensive fidelity in that it fails quite to understand what or which story is being told. It states compactly the surface melodrama of the case proposed, but only to miss the double underlying irony: avoidance, first, on Jim’s part, of the ordinary consequences of actual dishonour, and submission there-

after to the ignominy without the guilt. We are offered, not the old—and how familiar!—story of the man who fails dismally in a crisis and is whipped by his failure into a spectacular atoning success, but the new and far less obvious story of the man who fails twice over, deliberately invoking the undeserved consequences of the second failure and turning them into his one splendid triumph. Defeat without the penalties, then victory without the tangible rewards, is the intellectual contour of the plot; and the emphasis is kept throughout on the extraordinary tangle of Jim's relations with himself. Of all Conrad's men he is perhaps the most solitary in spirit. The special difficulty of doing justice is imposed by the maze of cross-purposes in the man's own sense of responsibility. His "cowardice" requires a definition of very fine shadings, if indeed it is not strictly indefinable, and the "retribution," if it is his destruction, is also equally his fulfilment. What Mr. Conrad has here denied himself is the thrill of a sharp moral issue fought out with desperate and exciting obviousness in terms of physical event, the effect of which would lose force with reconsideration just in proportion as it overwhelmed at the first impact. What he has attempted and achieved

is the delineation of that which lies behind the act of cowardice, the conditions on which the coward makes peace with his own heart. And that there may exist not one of even the external trappings of melodrama, Jim is allowed to die without material justification or forgiveness. In a sense he reaps what he has sown; but Marlow alone of all the world knew what he reaped, or bothered so much as to conjecture what he had sown. It is in such cases of penetration to the core of a moral issue that Mr. Conrad most sharply exemplifies the reserve that renounces magical command over the feelings in order to explore the hinterland and secret source of feeling. In the particular instance the mood of the story is compounded of such reserve, applied by the author to his whole conception, and the resignation of Marlow, the immediate narrator; and, lest the resultant blend savour of academic artifice and the mechanical working-out of a formula, the resignation of Marlow is finely tempered at times with an affectionate and thoroughly human irritation at Jim's incorrigible quixotism.

More reflections than we can afford the luxury of voicing surround the choice and application of

mood as practised in these novels and tales. The most fruitful of all, perhaps, here to be left as a suggestion flung out, concerns the difference between fiction as a fusion of the author's attitude with the objective thing attended to, and fiction as a report of the objective thing, merely. That difference, the gap between recreation of life and simple reproduction, leaves, by contrast with Mr. Conrad, much current fiction floundering and gasping in the piled masses of its own gathered material—material with which, consideration tells us, nothing has been done, and which is presented to us just on the ground of its undoubted actuality. Photographic realism, the reportorial facility in catching and handling external truth, results, even at its most gifted extension, in work to which we can apply no measure except, as Mr. James puts it, the "measure by saturation." Conrad has indeed that facility without, as he says, ever having made a note of a fact, a memory, or an impression; he etches his miniatures as sharply as the professional notebook realist. But his fancy is ever constructively at work upon the finer congruities that subsist between the aspect observed and the sensitized observing faculty; so that (except, indeed, as his life of the body has attained the rank of a fine art)

he is not to be confounded with the globe-trotting realists who have offered their memoirs and confessions under the guise of fiction. Mr. Conrad's insistence on the reporter's mood as of equal importance with the possession of something to report is nothing less than insistence on criticism of the author by the author—his own use of the mental or moral attitude of candour being, as in *Youth*, the faculty of self-criticism actively engaged, sensibly present as part of the story. So much is but to reaffirm indirectly the inadequacy, from every considered point of view, of many thousands of pages worth the momentary plaudits they receive, but unlighted by the critical faculty, and appealing solely to the reader's recognition of them as "realism"—truth, that is, unutilized and relatively wasted. And that reflection drives us back in turn to the complete absence of waste in an art made up of the fusion of subjective with objective, the fusion effected and enforced by method.

It is upon the subjective side of his art alone that Mr. Conrad practises the reserve that demands exclusion. In his selection of the phase of life he is concerned primarily, on a scale new to English letters, with inclusion. His species of unity require the leisurely length of narrative process that

goes more with the ideal of getting in all that belongs to the identity of the subject than with keeping out everything that does not belong. Both in the short story and in the novel he represents the extreme of reaction against technique as an arbitrary ideal of brevity and compression, a set of laws imposed upon the subject from without, toward technique as an agent of the subject—truth and personality being, in this view, part of the subject. In making the short story short, on the “cross-section” theory of life and character, and in keeping the novel at its due length, more and more of truth has been pushed out of the one, more and more of action pushed into the other. The short story tends toward a kind of crackling smartness, being acceptable, down to the practicable or printable minimum, in inverse ratio to its length; and naturally enough individual specimens become as ephemeral as April snowflakes. The novel evolves at the same time toward the moving picture teeming with episodes unrelated and unadorned. Technicians simplify character and denature life to the point where a work of fiction is acclaimed for having become a game without any of the thrill proper to games, a mere contest with rules. The real adversary is, of course, the inherent and in-

alienable difficulty of preserving the evanescent meanings of life in words whose meanings are still more evanescent. Usher technique in at the door with all the homage accorded kings, ministers, presidents, and potentates generally, whose claim is after all their service, not their authority—and very quietly, without so much as a flutter of the wings to make any one remember the charmed presence, life flies out by the window. Mr. Conrad, remembering on one side that in general the greatest short stories in the language are the longest—"The Gold-Bug," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," "The Merry Men," "Without Benefit of Clergy," "The Man Who Would Be King," and "The Turn of the Screw" are there to suggest without proving the point—and on the other that the novel ought to be an invitation to consider a segment of life more intensively than we do normally consider anything, has made the two forms more like each other than, in English at least, we have ever known them become. The shortest tales of his maturity are in bulk like the longest of others, his longest like the shortest of his novels. In the short story he has sixty thousand words for "The End of the Tether," a plot more bare of episode than that of many a magazine story kept within the extreme of editorial

generosity—say a tenth as many. In the novel his method is equally the Russian method of elaboration, a delving deeply enough into attendant and antecedent circumstances to produce the effect of power, not speed. The lesson in both cases is that of the small field well tilled. A Conrad story ramifies in several directions, sets itself to the discovery of unnumbered contacts and values.

Nothing that can directly or indirectly emphasize the central motif is discarded; no momentary appearance of violated unity is too perilous to be risked if its result will count in the total. The author will assemble a prodigious amount of antecedent machinery, and proceed only when he has satisfied his sense of what we may call preliminary completion. He will tell five subsidiary digressive stories on the way to his main event. In a word, much of his amplitude strikes one at first as maddening, intolerable perversity; but never after one has finished the story and tried to invent an alternative method. One finds then the reason for that unremitting assemblage of seeming impertinences. The reason is, in its shortest version, that the effectiveness of a *dénouement* resting exclusively on character is intensified in proportion to one's intimacy with the character. The ideal of

fullest possible intimacy comports ill with brief and fragmentary work. We have had what ought to be enough of the convenient short story that shows its subject with the illusory distinctness of a lightning flash, enough, too, of the convenient novel that whirls us through a large area with the speed of a modern express train, so that life is left stationary and unaltered behind. What we want to see is, of course, life itself moving ahead—life as intricate as we know it in actuality, with all its skein of purpose and cross-purpose involved in the single act. That want is what our author satisfies when, in the overpowering cumulative effect of a story, we see a score of minor episodes and a hundred tangential meanings brought into alignment, reduced to a fine organization, all made to count, and count simultaneously. Every crisis is a lesson in amplified means rigorously adapted to an end. The danger is that one may see at first only the amplification, the preposterous generosity, and miss the adaptation, which is the art. The adaptive agent is the dominant mood of the whole, gathering at the end all the flying hoops of our interest on one shaft, as a circus trickster casts a single javelin through a series of rings set swinging in opposed directions.

It becomes at this stage important to recognize the method of amplification or complicated muchness as genuinely a part of the story, not an engraftment upon it; for only by such recognition can we at all apprehend, as we have phrased it, what story is being told, what the selected subject or phase of life is. Justice can be rendered to the intimacy of the alliance between purpose and design by nothing short of a statement that every protest against the method employed is in effect a suggestion that the author ought to have told some other story instead of the one he elected to tell—such protest being, we dare to hold, not criticism. *Chance*, Mr. Conrad's study of Flora de Barral, the daughter of a convict financier, of her escape from an intolerable governess to the protection of the kindly disposed but puzzled Fynes, and of her ultimate rescue by Captain Anthony (quite the most admirable of ships' officers), provides a recent illustration. The special ingenuity of *Chance* lies in a logical extension of the colloquial method used in earlier stories, a sort of stratified arrangement of observers and narrators and the downmost basis of episode. The narrative process consists of bringing up the story through successive layers to the reader sifted of the irrelevant and at every transference

enriched by speculative accretions. Concretely, and accurately enough for our contention, Part I is the author's report of Marlow's report of Fyne's report of what happened—Mrs. Fyne being sometimes inserted as still another stratum. In Part II Powell, a ship's officer under Captain Anthony, is substituted for the Fynes. It is in this astoundingly intricate organization that Mr. Conrad proves how far he is from wishing merely to effect a juxtaposition of the physical event and the most competent reciter. In *Chance* the best narrator of all is at the top nearest the reader, not at the bottom nearest the story. The keenest eye is farthest from the object, seeing in fact not the object but only how others see it. Marlow and, over him, the author represent the editorial mind, gathering, weighing, rejecting, reassembling, and, above all, interpreting. Our knowledge comes piecemeal, through an interpretation of a paraphrase of a report, and the truth is to be had only from all the versions taken at once and superposed into a composite photograph.

Mr. Henry James half commits himself to the suspicion that the method blurs and befogs the objectivity of the characters, and that the necessary fusion takes place rather between the different

sub-divisions of the writer's own genius than, as it ought, between his genius and its object. On the assumption that the projected story is of Flora de Barral and Captain Anthony solely, and that the problem of method is to get that story most effectually told, there is no really conclusive answer to that suspicion. But what precisely *is* the subject of *Chance*? Isn't it partly an unknowable or, say, speculative essence, depending on opinions *about* opinions?

Above all, isn't it a larger affair altogether than even the tenderness of the two people who fairly demand so large a share of our sympathy? The method is not an embroidery upon the phase of life, but its boundary. All the derived secondary displays of sympathy in the chain of observers are part of the adventure reported on; and the story is mainly, though not exclusively, of Marlow's exploration of the facts and characters. Criticism has hardly made its beginning until it has seen Marlow's "prolonged hovering flight of the subjective over the outstretched round of the case exposed" as definitely in and of the *whole* case exposed. In short, the story told is not more that of the oddly assorted pair, the convict banker's daughter and her seafaring lover, than it

is of Marlow's growing realization of them. He discovers them, thanks partly to the Fynes and Powell, in the act of discovering each other, and it is his discovery of that discovery that provides the spectacle. The result becomes on this basis an example of the liveliest untiring intuition flying straight to its object through manifold difficulties, and making in the end more of its object than could conceivably have been made on easier terms. We may pause only long enough to point out how resolutely this one case presents the author's favourite philosophy of fellowship intensified by the hardships against which it operates—leaving, however, the emphasis on our present contention, that to reject the whole story offered for a lesser part of it is to fall measurably short of what we choose to mean by criticism.

If we have at all succeeded in disentangling the whole identity of the story from the sum of physical events contained in it, we have accounted at the same stroke for the seemingly demented chronology which is also a familiar part of Mr. Conrad's adjustment of phase to mood. It is obvious enough that mood and chronology cannot both be supreme; that is, that if the natural sequence of events enforces the desired mood, it merely happens to do so,

as in *Youth* and *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* As a consequence the supremacy of the mood, on which Mr. Conrad everywhere insists, often compels a readjustment of events or calculated distortion of chronology. The previous history of a character is sketched invariably in conjunction with a present crisis, at the instant when comprehension of the character tells most heavily. Causes, in the form of episodes disinterred from the past, are brought to bear on their subsequent results without the gap imposed by chronological order. In *Nostromo*, for example, we read the secret of Doctor Monygham's ancient infidelity as a comment on his present dogged and self-effacing devotion to the Goulds.

Such treatment turns the antecedent action of a story from a necessary evil or, at the familiar worst, an unnecessary bore, into a definite advantage. One need only imagine the events of *Nostromo* reproduced in the order of their occurrence to appreciate the almost prohibitive difficulty of holding the structure together. The plot, left to itself, is a sprawling and ungainly affair, spread over many years, with the pivotal character suppressed until the last act. The problem of design is to bring together at the earliest possible moment the central-

izing impersonal force of the story and the centralizing person—the material interest represented by the silver mine and Nostromo. The one artistic point of departure is the interlocking of those two destinies. That point, the outbreak of the insurrection, in which Nostromo appears on the side of property rights, forms the substance of the first narrative chapter; and after that the entire past and future of the mine and of Costaguana are woven round the history of three days, representing the outbreak, the crisis, and the end of the revolution. Like the short story of orthodox formula, *Nostromo* begins near, almost at, the culminating point. What it unfolds is not so much the chronology of events as the chronology of an idea: the sinister power of the San Tomé mine over a miscellany of lives. We see that influence first as historical, political, economic, a generalized and distributive thing. From chapter to chapter it is brought into sharper and sharper focus on individual lives, until at last it works its will on the single selected victim, the man once most nearly immune. The narration goes back in time only that it may advance in every other respect. Through the six hundred pages the idea of material interests as an insuperable force in a community of

lives sweeps evenly on, dragging after it the litter of situations and scattered events as a speeding engine sucks flying straws from every direction into its wake. Like *Almayer's Folly*, like *A Personal Record*, *Nostromo* becomes on this principle, instead of the thing of tatters and loose ends it might have been, a firm and tightly woven fabric, with every thread caught into its place in the pattern.

A more sharply defined and localized instance of chronology thwarted in the service of a higher coherence is to be found in the structure of the great epic of red revolution, *Under Western Eyes*. The story consists of four almost exactly equal parts (it is difficult not to call them acts), each, roughly, of a hundred pages. In Part I Razumov, a young Russian student of reflective cast, secretly betrays to the police a fugitive, Haldin, who has committed a political murder. In Parts II and III Razumov appears inexplicably in Geneva among the colony of revolutionists, and is greeted by Haldin's sister as the man supposed to have been nearest her brother's heart. In Part IV Razumov, tortured unbearably by the irony of his situation as the friend of revolutionists and the idealized object of passionate devotion on the part of his victim's

sister, confronts the inmost circle of anarchists with the confession of his true character, and accepts his penalty of worse than death. As a singularly rich instance of compression in point of view and sources of information, in its sustained presentment of the deep-rooted unconscious irony of political Russia, in its analysis of the tragedy and the inevitability of the revolutionary spirit, *Under Western Eyes* invites the most generous critical elaboration. It is enough here to point out the one great condensation of dramatic irony in a single character and in the ghastly incongruity of two principal facts about him. The character is Razumov, betrayer, spy, to all intents murderer, yet somehow patriot and moralist. The two facts are his consent to serve as the spy of a bureaucracy, and his entrance under false colours into the heart of the woman whose brother he has destroyed. Chronologically, the two facts are widely separated. Mr. Conrad's method brings them together at the cost of reversing their order. Part I ends with a pointed statement of Razumov's anomalous position as one committed by his own act to the autocracy, yet distrusted and spied upon by it. He has displayed his resentment of the government's suspicion, and announced to the Police Commis-

sioner, Mikulin, at a final interview, that he takes the liberty to retire—"simply to retire."

"He walked to the door, thinking, 'Now he must show his hand. He must ring and have me arrested before I am out of the building, or he must let me go. And either way . . .'

"An unhurried voice said:

"'Kiryllo Sidorovitch.'

"Razumov, at the door, turned his head.

"'To retire,' he repeated.

"'Where to?' asked Councilor Mikulin softly."

Parts II and III follow, recounting Razumov's subsequent appearance in Geneva, and the action proceeds as on an unlighted stage until, at the beginning of Part IV, the broken conversation with Mikulin is resumed and finished. The withheld fact, Razumov's consent to serve the government as a spy upon the anarchist coterie in Geneva, is then so divulged as to throw a blinding glare on past, present, and future, and to heighten the terms of Razumov's moral *impassé*. Not for the device itself does one claim originality: it is the common property of melodrama and mystery. What is unique in this employment of it is its unconditional divorce from its traditional partner suspense. For we penetrate, of course, from a dozen veiled allusions, the capacity in which

Razumov has gone to Geneva. Not previous mystification renders the full disclosure so overwhelming, but the carefully planned and wrought juxtaposition of the two incongruous facts, whose resultant determines the mood of the entire work. The trick consists of utilizing the crisis of form to prepare and stress the crisis of event. Once more the dominant note is of fusion or compression—compression of means into a method, of means and method together into a purpose, of the purpose into a philosophy, of the philosophy into service; the undiscouraged and unremitting service to the truth of the visible universe; such service as takes its reward, for art as for life, in “a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile—and the return to an eternal rest.”

That note of fusion among components endlessly varied in kind and scope is what must terminate our effort to perceive Mr. Conrad not as a master so much of the individual encounter, the brilliant single exploit, as of the whole plaited or spun or woven substance of life itself—life in the large—of which every isolated encounter is a thread insignificant or important just in proportion as it knots itself loosely or firmly with the rest. Mr.

Conrad's expertness in special cases has received recognition more than aplenty. But it is sometimes overlooked that every one of his cases is a case of something. Seemingly he will have more and more to be defended as a master not of the specific at all but of the general; as an exponent of the fine modern art of making the story illustrational of something greater than itself, without at the same time making it didactic. The history of his technical development is solely the history of his tightening grasp of this process. He provided the most significant of the clues in which his work abounds when, creating Marlow in his own intellectual image, he described that raconteur as one to whom "the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel, but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze." At that early period of his great experiment, however, Mr. Conrad had not found the way to make a tale illustrational without also making it ponderous and somewhat sluggish of movement. He supplied, not indeed a small glow, but an immense amount of the misty aura of meaning round it. His progress since has been toward economy. The light from within the story has become steadier and brighter, the mist of meaning

without by consequence less and less visible (though by no means less present), until, in *Chance* and *Victory* and the three tales of the volume 'Twixt *Land and Sea*, the mist is absorbed altogether into the glow—the story *is* the meaning. The problem has been to make the projected recital say constantly less in terms of reflection, more in terms of action; to make it stand as representatively as ever for a quantity of life, yet stand ever more securely by itself as a story. That evolution toward economy reaches surely its most advanced stage in *Victory*, a work which has every surface appearance of meaning nothing except what it is, but which as insistently as any of its predecessors refuses to be dismissed simply as “a tale that is told.”

At every stage of this growth the system of expedients which we call art is at once indispensable and subordinate. That it is indispensable is what we hope so many words will not quite have failed to show. That it is subordinate is a truth illuminated by the one fact that it has but to be understood to be forgotten. Iconoclasm in technique may be the road, but it is not the destination. And if one feel won to ask what and where the all-important destination itself is, which

fruitful province shall the critic invade for his answer—let him try with whatever will to forsake the old paths leading to the old catchwords—if not the already explored and charted but not too thick-settled province of universality. A part of Mr. Conrad's distinction is indeed that he has done many things in new ways; but the greatest part after all is that, in the decisive matter of determining what things shall be done, to insist on the new has not been to insist on the little. The originality of fiction has so often and even, it would seem, so fondly deserted the well-lighted stage of life's great enactments for trifling and tawdry data gathered from the murk behind the scenes, that the intricate and the obscure have become at last the obvious, and the true originality recoils upon simple and fundamental things. The only new affairs are so old that we know without having learned them—love and hate, youth, ambition, greed, the mystery of race, the struggle for existence, liberty, the cradle and the grave, questions the soul asks of the unknown, the loneliness of the soul among shadows, sunrise and starlight and the sea. Such realities, unchangeable and always changing, the same forever and all things to all men, make up the enduring appeal of our author.

He has his share of subsidiary and transient phases of truth. He understands, presumably, that woman is not necessarily and in all ways either superior or inferior to man, that marriage is not all that is asserted for or against it, that immense riches sometimes turn out to be only an inhibition, that work done with a will is sacred, that one trouble with the poor is their poverty, that worship is infested with superstitions, and that the deity is probably not a mid-Victorian gentleman of the leisured class, patriarchally whiskered, sitting on a hilltop with a sceptre in his hand. Yet Mr. Conrad has remained an artist who, facing all such truths and half-truths in an age when they are most rife, has given us, not a new feminism, a new sociology, a new religion, or even a New Thought, but only a generous handful of new stories. One of his claims to our gratitude is that he hates some new things for the exact reasons that have been alleged against some old things. His case against social revolution, for example, is Mr. Galsworthy's case against social convention: simply that it is strong enough sometimes to involve in tragedy and actually to destroy many who have by nature no sympathy with it, and were born for better destinies. Against an impressive weight of au-

thority he has proved that fiction can attain the contemporary interest of being, in emphasis and vision, profoundly social, without having at the same time to become sociological. The method, not the substance or the purpose, is new. Arrayed in many garbs, shown in many shifting lights, the substance is one thing and one only: the heart of life, beating "on and on to the appointed end, which, being Truth itself, is One—one for all men and for all occupations."

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